

HINDSIGHT IN GREEK AND ROMAN HISTORY



Edited by
Anton Powell

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Editor

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CONTENTS

	Page
Preface and Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction	
<i>Anton Powell</i>	ix
1 Historical explanation and what didn't happen: the virtues of virtual history	1
<i>Christopher Pelling</i>	
2 Herodotos and the avoidance of hindsight	25
<i>Emily Baragwanath</i>	
3 Athens' Sicilian expedition: contemporary scenarios of its outcome	49
<i>Roger Brock</i>	
4 The shadow of what might have been: sideshadowing in Thucydides and Xenophon	71
<i>Lisa Irene Hau</i>	
5 Spartan supremacy: a 'possession for ever'? Early-fourth-century expectations of enduring ascendancy	91
<i>Helen Roche</i>	
6 Confusing aim and result? Hindsight and the disintegration of Alexander the Great's empire	113
<i>Alexander Meens</i>	
7 How to avoid being a backward-looking prophet – counterfactuals in Polybius	149
<i>Felix K. Maier</i>	
8 Anticipating Octavian's failure: from Tauromenium to the death of Cleopatra	171
<i>Anton Powell</i>	
9 <i>Memoriae eximere</i> : AD 41 and the survival of republicanism under the Principate	201
<i>Katherine Low</i>	
Index	223

PREFACE
and
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book arises from a panel entitled ‘Hindsight: the importance of unfulfilled expectations in Greek and Roman history’, which was part of the Sixth Celtic Conference in Classics, held at the University of Edinburgh in July 2010. Conceived by Anton Powell, the panel owed much of its architecture to Kai Brodersen and Christopher Pelling. Professors Brodersen and Pelling both provided crucial early encouragement for the venture, and also identified several potential speakers who now are among the authors of the volume. Each accordingly was invited, as he deserved, to be credited as Editor.

The present Editor wishes to thank two other colleagues who contributed greatly to the Edinburgh panel, and were also invited to share in the writing of the volume: Dr Dorit Engster who read a paper on ‘Perseus of Macedon: prospects of a new Alexander?’ and Professor John Matthews who spoke on ‘Alternatives to the Roman Principate?’.

Respectful thanks are due also to Ms Clare O’Reilly, formerly Clare Grey of the University of Wales, Cardiff, whose contributions to discussion were widely appreciated.

A.P.

INTRODUCTION

Practising historians are sometimes averse to the formal study of method, as being of little practical value. They, we, may prefer to be guided instead by intuition – and even by analogy. One may, for instance, reflect that one can sense perfectly the difference between running and walking without ever having thought of its definition. One may, if challenged, advance a wrong definition: that the difference between those two forms of motion consists in speed (rather than in whether both feet are off the ground at the one time). Indeed, if one attempts to define a process at the moment of enacting it, one may sometimes come to grief. Thus if one asks, while descending stairs, whether the trailing foot is normally moved to the same stair as the leading foot or to a lower stair, one risks confusion and accident. However, we contend that history is not best practised by a merely intuitive grasp of method.

This book attempts to open new fields of research across much of Greek and Roman history. It advances a method of illuminating almost every ancient episode for which there is evidence of what historical agents planned, anticipated – or feared. The techniques here advocated and developed are – fundamentally – not new. They have been practised, albeit sporadically, since Antiquity. Several chapters in this volume study the efforts of ancient writers to resist hindsight in their own day. But, we contend, their efforts have been imitated too rarely by students of Antiquity in modern times. The techniques in question are, the recording and reconstruction of those political and military forecasts – tenuous or confident, precise or vague – which with retrospect seem *not* to have come true.

We argue, through the study of diverse episodes central to the study of Antiquity, that hindsight has, by playing down or eliminating the record of unfulfilled forecast, obscured the past. Thus, for example, the reasons why Athenians expected the success of the Sicilian Expedition of 415, or why Romans in the 30s BC may have expected the failure of Octavian, tend to be understated or lost as the historian privileges the thinking which was fulfilled, the causality which does, in the event, seem to have operated. A similar process commonly applies to outward events, even those of grand scale, when those events appear not to fit with a process grander still, and thus deemed of superior interest. Athenian successes in the early stages of the Sicilian Expedition (carefully noted by Thucydides) may seem to the modern reader little more than a poignant irrelevance; Octavian's dramatic failures as a military commander in the 40s and 30s are commonly

overlooked. In short, modern historians risk distinguishing in their accounts according to a criterion inapplicable to the mentalities of the ancient actors they describe: namely whether a forecast would fail or a tendency in events would continue.

The process of minimising, of playing down or suppressing, certain real anticipations begins in the very acts of history. Political or military leaders often have good operational reasons not to make clear all their ambitions or the reasons for which they may fear failure. After the act, after victory, a winner may have both motive and means to suppress public discussion of why his or her failure was even thinkable. But the interest of rulers, effective though it is, is perhaps not the most potent agent in the systematic forgetting – by the wider public and by historians – of failed forecast.

What may count more is, that the scenarios in unfulfilled forecasts remain as mere fantasms, whereas those which tended towards the winning side are confirmed enduringly all around, in marble, in brick, in the flesh. As men watched Lysandros' demolition of Athens' naval fortifications, how many might readily remember that, only fifteen years earlier, Athenian naval power had seemed irresistible, capable (as Perikles had earlier claimed) of extension at will? Who, in 9 BC, surrounded by the physical and moral architecture of Augustan Rome, could easily conceive that forty years earlier the Pompeian cause might have seemed the likelier to prevail? In modern narratives, as in ancient, it is the military *celeritas* of Julius Caesar and the (eventual) political adroitness of his heir, which are emphasised. In contrast, the promise of the Pompeian cause, with its coherent naval strategy and its relatively gentle and conservative politics, is now left for a few historians to disinter. In the case of the Athenian empire, we can perhaps see the propaganda of a dominant regime struggling against the force of hindsight. It was in Athens' interest, in the late fifth century, to stress the original and eminently allowable defensive purpose of her hegemony: the purpose of resisting Persia. But fears of Persian aggression had not been fulfilled. The Persians after 490 and 480–79 had not reinvaded. Thus the scenario of a third Persian invasion, an invasion arguably prevented by Athenian domination of the Aegean, had by the late fifth century become incapable of inspiring much respect in other Greeks, indeed so insubstantial as not to be noticed by Thucydides (cf. below, p. 39). In the late fifth century, history was not merely the propaganda of a ruling group. Popular hindsight was more influential. Remembering historical climates is a minority activity.

What do historians have to lose, and thus to gain, by their attitude towards unfulfilled forecasts of Antiquity? Even for those events and processes which are privileged in modern accounts, such as the fall of

empires (Sparta's as well as Athens'), the establishment of regimes (Hellenistic and Roman: the regimes of Alexander's Successors, of Augustus and of Claudius), forecasts unfulfilled – and now neglected – should form much of the story, sometimes much of the explanation, as chapters in this book will argue. Forecasting, whether successful in retrospect or not, ought to be a central object of study for those interested in ancient mentalities for their own sake. Even in modern societies, relatively untroubled by questions of immediate survival, the concern with economic, political and sporting forecasting can be seen in every news-medium. Indeed the word 'newspaper' may sometimes seem a misnomer, and 'almanac' more appropriate, so extensively is news presented as a platform for prediction. Additionally, for the Ancient Historian, even in the case of grand events already much-studied, attention to unfulfilled forecast may allow not only new explanations but, on occasion, a radically different description of the events in question. The death of Cleopatra VII may be such a case (see Ch. 8).

This book is not for the most part concerned with 'virtual history', in the sense of imaginings in elaborate detail of what might have happened if, for example, the result of a particular battle had been different. (Our authors are among those historians who find, in Antiquity as today, that drastically different outcomes are more easily conceived as the result of military happenings than in the case of large social tendencies.) Where authors in this book (Pelling, Baragwanath, Brock) do treat cases of grand 'virtual history', it is in part to illustrate the fragility of the generalisations, the causal schemes, on which historians and the wider public often depend. Historical writers have been criticised for confidently identifying causal patterns at work in the past, while being incapable of seeing how comparable schemes might shape even the immediate future. Felix Maier (below, Ch. 7) notes the ironic description of historians as 'backward-looking prophets', by the philosopher Friedrich Schlegel. The question whether historians' causal generalisations ought, if valid, to be able to function as predictions is perhaps too much for any one book, and will not be addressed here. But a more modest finding may usefully be claimed. Several authors in this study find that a sense of the unpredictability of events, the uncertainty of contemporary observers, is recorded more often by sources contemporary with, or close to, the events in question, and tends to fade as the source becomes more remote in time. (See Index under 'hindsight'.) There is an obvious inference: the better informed the observer, the more he or she is likely to be aware of the working of forecasts which were not fulfilled by events. Taken together, the studies in this book point to, and may help to reduce, the danger that Ancient Historians may serenely and remotely

impute predictability to events in Antiquity, and thus obscure for their readers the multiple outcomes for which ancient populations had to allow, the multiple insecurities with which they had to live. Our collective studies may seem to commend a practical principle: that historians of every situation should try *for a time* to put out of mind knowledge of what ensued, and instead to focus rigorously on what people at the time might foresee, people who were obliged to depend for their forecasts strictly on ideas about their own past.

In Chapter 1, CHRISTOPHER PELLING explores the utility of virtual history as a corrective to unreflecting views of what, with retrospect, may be judged inevitable – even predictable – events. He cites a dramatic but studious piece of modern fiction, on How-Hitler-might-have-won-and-what-then?, to show that normal assumptions about inevitable Allied victory can be effectively challenged by plausible hypotheses involving German successes. In short, commonplace assumptions of today cannot easily explain Hitler's defeat; *a fortiori* contemporaries of the war were in no position to predict its outcome. Similarly, Pelling argues, contemporaries of the war between Octavian and Antony should be allowed deep uncertainty in advance about its result. He studies the way in which certain ancient writers – Herodotos, Polybios, Livy – evaluate, with counterfactual hypothesis, ideas that developments in Antiquity were inevitable or predictable for contemporaries. He shows that, while Ancient Historians of today may decry 'virtual history', their own routine statements of causality, as about a military defeat bringing down a regime, themselves suggest a limited form of virtual history: that without the battle the regime would have continued. He himself ventures a counterfactual prediction, that victory by Antony over Octavian would have been detrimental to the Roman empire.

Herodotos' attempts to avoid hindsight are further explored by EMILY BARAGWANATH in Chapter 2. His work contains, she argues, numerous challenges to ideas in his own day that Greek victory in the Persian Wars was straightforward or heavily overdetermined. Herodotos' method is to describe, or hint at, alternative events which might – on normal assumptions – easily have happened. For Herodotos, Athens (and in consequence Sparta) nearly failed. Whereas for Plutarch, criticizing Herodotos at a great distance, developments were simpler and more reassuring.

In Chapter 3 ROGER BROCK also demonstrates that virtual history, far from being (as some have recently suggested) a mainly modern practice, was extensively performed by the first historians of ancient Greece.

Brock's focus is on Thucydides' portrayal of Athens' invasion of Sicily (415–13 BC) and especially on those episodes of the invasion where, Thucydides signals, things came close to having an outcome opposite to the one we know. Writing closer to the events than did Herodotos, Thucydides – Brock's analysis may suggest – is even richer than his predecessor in his record of ways not taken, of historical near-misses. Thucydides, he finds, communicates well the uncertainty facing contemporaries as to how events would play out. Brock explores the neglected questions of what Athenians planned to do in Sicily, and what they came close to achieving. While the Greek writer works to avoid hindsight, and largely succeeds, even he occasionally succumbs to its influence (p. 52). Brock himself tentatively sketches various possible outcomes if Athens had, in any sense, won in Sicily. Orthodox virtual history holds that Athens' empire would have lasted longer without the Sicilian debacle. Brock, in contrast, suggests that this defeat may ultimately have been responsible for Athens' very survival.

LISA IRENE HAU treats, in Chapter 4, the use made both by Thucydides and by Xenophon of ideas about how, in slightly different circumstances, history might have turned out differently. She finds (p. 86) these two historians more apt to see variant forecasts and outcomes of events within their own lifetime than were Polybius and Livy as *they* looked back, from the Roman era, to events over 200 years earlier. She also detects a similar pattern of difference *within* the work of Thucydides: the events most remote from his own time, those treated in Book I, are – Hau finds – portrayed as natural and inevitable in a way which contrasts with the greater openness of possibilities suggested by Thucydides' treatment of most events in his later books, events from his adult lifetime. But she too finds a degree of hindsight in the Greek writer's portrayal of the 'doomed' Sicilian expedition.

In Chapter 5 HELEN ROCHE examines the way historians, modern and ancient, have applied hindsight to the Spartan empire of 404–371, and to its downfall. Observing that many modern treatments of the period are labelled as studies in Spartan failure, she detects a tendency to over-emphasise error and lack of foresight on the part of Sparta. To counter this tendency, Roche assembles information and reasoning which, on normal logic, might have made Spartans confident that there would be no such disaster as in fact befell them at Leuktra in 371. The modern tendency to impute predictive ineptitude to Sparta she traces in part to the ancient sources, most notably to the (contemporary) Xenophon and to Diodorus, both of whom laid stress on Sparta's moral failings as causes of a collapse which, in retrospect, might seem inevitable.

For ALEXANDER MEEUS in Chapter 6 the question is, whether Successors to Alexander the Great aimed severally at becoming ruler over the whole of his former empire, or whether each (or most) of them settled very early for the ambition of ruling only a substantial fragment. For Meeus, it is likely that the ambition to rule the whole was widespread. And, if modern scholarship generally holds the opposite, this time it is not the ancient sources who are responsible. The sources, Meeus argues, reveal – or are at least compatible with – ambitions to reunite the empire. Modern scholars, in assuming that the Successors saw such ambition as impractical, have effectively, in Meeus' phrase, 'confused aim and result'. Meeus further sees modern hindsight as responsible for playing down the significance, in their own day, of a series of known figures, satraps under the Successors, who may in their own time have realistically hoped to succeed to Alexander's whole kingdom.

In Chapter 7, FELIX MAIER asks whether the ironic label of 'backward-looking prophet' might be applied to Polybius, a writer well known for his view that the rise of Rome was predestined, even predictable. Maier distinguishes (rather as de Ste Croix did with Thucydides) between the narrative and the summary, editorializing, elements of the writer's work. He finds numerous cases in Polybius' narrative of the writer's emphasizing that significant moments in Rome's rise, notably in the military sphere, could have gone, or nearly did go, very differently. In short, for Polybius, history was 'full of contradictory possibilities' (p. 157), and its actors were in no position to predict the details of its unfolding.

ANTON POWELL in Chapter 8 focuses on Octavian, and on moments when his ascent was threatened. He argues that his defeat at Tauromenium, prominent in the ancient record, has been minimized in modern times because it does not fit conventional narrative of the Rise of Octavian-Augustus. An alternative narrative, focusing on Octavian's military ineptitude and unfitness as heir to Julius Caesar, might easily have prevailed, if the fleeing Octavian had chanced to be captured at Tauromenium. Powell argues that this negative narrative is essential for understanding contemporary doubts about Octavian's future. Also treated by Powell is the death of Cleopatra. He argues that records of her suicide depend ultimately on information which was within Octavian's control and presented in his interest, and he seeks to reconstruct contemporary fears at the moment of Cleopatra's capture. Hindsight may have effaced the prospect that Octavian might follow Julius Caesar and Antony, and intimately favour the Hellenistic monarch. On Powell's argument, either to kill or to spare the queen was fraught with political danger for Octavian. By attending to Octavian's prospective thinking, we may detect a possibility that he decided to kill Cleopatra secretly.

In Chapter 9, KATHERINE LOW treats the ancient reports of significant attempts, following the death of Caligula, to restore the Roman Republic. These, she suggests, have been downplayed by historians, modern and ancient, from hindsight, through the idea that the revolutionary attempts came to nothing. She finds, like others of our authors in their separate fields, that the fullest surviving account of contemporary, and ultimately unfulfilled forecasts, in this case forecasts that a republican movement might succeed, is found in the source chronologically nearest to the events: Josephus. By giving careful attention to this attempted revolution, to its failure, and to Claudius's subsequent efforts to address its motives, Low argues that we are better able to explain why Tacitus finds no corresponding republican movement to record during the upheavals of AD 68–9, a period when a rapid and discreditable succession of five emperors might have been expected to revive desires for Rome's traditional constitution.

This book is intended chiefly as a demonstration, to the practising historian, that attention to the working of hindsight can improve performance of the historian's traditional activity. That is why the volume mainly takes the form of re-analysing, in familiar form, particular periods of Greek and Roman history, *exempli gratia*. Editor and authors are, however, aware that very large logical, some might say philosophical, questions are raised by our common subject. Do traditional causal statements, or suggestions, by historians already imply virtual history? Do they implicitly make a statement as to what would have happened if the events identified as causes had not occurred? That is an issue introduced and examined here in Pelling's chapter. How common is overdetermination; that is, how often can a supposed cause be hypothetically subtracted without implying a change in outcome? This is a question which Powell has addressed elsewhere (*Antiquité Classique* 49 [1980], 106–10). Do historians' explanations, and the causal generalisations to which they – explicitly or implicitly – appeal, imply that historians are possessed of rules capable of generating predictions? That we have chosen here not to dwell at great length on these questions does not imply that we believe them to be relatively unimportant. The opposite is the case. We wish to promote the discussion of such questions among historians. We judged that the most effective way to do so would be to demonstrate that the writing of history in traditional form can be fertilised by a change of method which raises those very questions.

ANTON POWELL
Swansea, October 2013

HISTORICAL EXPLANATION AND WHAT DIDN'T HAPPEN: THE VIRTUES OF VIRTUAL HISTORY

Christopher Pelling

I

We are in Nazi Germany: the year is 1964. Preparations are well underway for the celebration next week of the Führer's seventy-fifth birthday, and for a visit of the American President. We first get a glimpse of the President on television:

Across a distance of five thousand kilometers, President Kennedy flashed his famous smile. He stood behind a cluster of microphones, addressing a crowd in a football stadium. Banners of red, white, and blue streamed behind him – 'Re-elect Kennedy!', 'Four more in Sixty-Four!'...

Kennedy projected an image of youthful vigour, despite his spectacles and his balding head... 'He looks in a good shape for a man of seventy-five, wouldn't you say?'...

Charlotte Maguire had helped herself to a glass of Scotch from Stuckart's drink cabinet. Now she raised it to the television in mock salute. 'To Joseph P. Kennedy: President of the United States – appeaser, anti-Semite, gangster and sonofabitch. May you roast in hell.'

(Harris 1992, 118–20)

Or so Robert Harris's *Fatherland* has it, probably the most successful (certainly the best I have read)¹ of the what-if-Hitler-had-won genre – quite a large genre by now, in fact, so much so that it is the subject of a fascinating book-length study by Gavriel D. Rosenfeld (2005); the futuristic material written during the war itself is the topic of a Leicester PhD thesis (Hooley 2002). It is a neat trick that Harris plays there on the reader, but a thought-provoking one too. It was indeed the war that wrecked the career of Joseph Kennedy, John F. Kennedy's father, the US ambassador in London at the beginning of the war who made public statements about British democracy being doomed and the certainty of a quick German victory;² just as it was the war that played a part in the rise of his son, the

clean-cut naval hero of the Pacific, who offered both a contrast and a continuity with Eisenhower in 1960. Oh, and there is to be a further state-visit later this year of King Edward and Queen Wallis, in July.

And how did it happen? Harris tells us that too. Victory over Russia had come in 1943, when a strategic thrust had cut off the Red Army from the oilfields of the Caucasus, and Stalin's tanks had simply run out of fuel. Peace with Britain came in 1944, when the U-boats had been recalled to base to be equipped with new ciphers: 'the treacherous British, they were told, had been reading the Fatherland's codes'. Picking off merchant shipping was then a piece of cake, and Churchill and his warmongers had fled to Canada. Peace with America took two more years, till 1946, when Hitler's German scientists had developed a V-3 atomic bomb which he exploded in the skies over New York.³

It could all so easily have happened that way, or in some way very close to it. (Possibly the Enigma code-cracking would have needed to have been exposed a year or so earlier than that.) And that is the first thing that musing on virtual history, the history that didn't happen, can give, its first 'virtue': it brings home how contingent so much history is, how so easily it might never have happened. That is a theme that recurs often in this volume, as we see in case after case how differently events could have turned out. This chapter is about historiography rather than history, how historians put such thinking to work rather than whether they always get it right.

The *Fatherland* passages also bring out the relevance of virtual history for any thinking about historical causation and explanation. There is a basic logical sense in which any causal statement looks like an implied virtual-history statement: p led to q = if p had not happened, q might not (in the case of a sufficient cause) or would not (in the case of a necessary cause) have happened either; so to claim any causal significance for p implies speculation about what would have happened if p had not taken place. That is what lawyers, as they grapple with causation and responsibility, call 'but-for' analysis: q might or would not have happened but for p happening first. Now there has to be more to it than that. Given that there are any number of things 'but for' which a later thing would not have happened – the murderer's father and mother happening to meet, or the victim's decision to pop out for a burger at the wrong moment – we need a few more criteria to discriminate the hot 'but for's from the cold ones. That is the sort of puzzle that was already occupying Antiphon in the *Tetralogies*: if I hit you but you then go to an incompetent doctor and you die, am I responsible or is it the doctor (*Tetr.* 3)? And that is what preoccupies Gorgias in the *Helen* too, or Euripides and his audience in the debate

between Helen and Hecuba in Euripides' *Troades*:⁴ was it Hecuba's fault for giving birth to Paris, and/or the herdsman's for not strangling Paris at birth (*Tro.* 920–2)? But at least it is fair to say that if there is no 'but for' element at all, if *q* would have happened anyway whether or not *p* happened first, then the causal analysis is beginning to look embarrassed (though even there we can have problems of events being over-determined, as we shall see shortly):⁵ so virtual thinking does matter here. And, if we were to pursue the theoretical issues, we might well discover that telling the hotter causes from the colder would itself involve some virtual thinking, positing other scenarios which go beyond what has actually happened here: something along the lines of 'might *p*, if replicated in other virtual cases which were relevantly similar, be expected to produce *q* sufficiently often?' There are other possibilities too.⁶

The *Fatherland* instances are also useful in bringing out that this sort of virtual reflection can look in either direction. It can start from a well-known event – Germany losing the war – and look backward, tracing the conditions that had to have been in place if it was going to happen that way, the non-detection of the Enigma code-breaking or Britain's and America's scientists getting the atom bomb first. Or it can look forward to things that would have been different if the great event had not happened, or had happened differently: if the war had ended differently, it could have been – 'could have been' rather than 'would have been', as the possible variations are always so great⁷ – a different Kennedy in power twenty years later.

Let us take the forward-looking element first. We shall see quite a lot of that in the ancient material, normally stressing how *momentous* an event is: the future which we know depended so much on it. That is a development of the closest analogy in ancient poetry, especially epic – the phenomenon analysed by Heinz-Günther Nesselrath in his *Ungeschehenes Geschehen* (1992): 'And now Aeneas lord of men would have perished there, had Aphrodite daughter of Zeus not sharply realised...' (*Iliad* 5.311–12);⁸ this is what Reinhardt called the 'epic "almost"', and Nesselrath calls 'Nearly-episodes'.⁹ Nesselrath found 46 such cases in the *Iliad* along with 27 in the *Odyssey* and 20 in the *Aeneid*,¹⁰ and the trick is familiar enough for Ovid to play with the conceit four times within sixty-five lines when he is taking off the epic style in mid-*Metamorphoses* 8, most strikingly with the thought that Nestor would never have got to Troy had he not taken an un-Nestor-like pole-vault into a nearby tree (*Met.* 8.365–8).¹¹ Important elements of plot can be retrospectively imperilled in this way: 'and now the Achaeans would have fallen back upon their ships...' (*Il.* 11.311, cf. 8.217–9, *Od.* 24.50–2) or even 'have returned home contrary

to fate' (*Il.* 2.155–6); 'and now they would have taken the city that same day...' (*Il.* 18.454, cf. 16.698–700, 21.544–6); 'and poor Odysseus would have died there' amid the waves (*Od.* 5.436); 'and Troy would still be standing, and you, high citadel of Priam, would still be there' (Virg. *Aen.* 2.56), if only the Trojans had noticed the hollow ring let out when the spear stuck in the flank of the Wooden Horse.

Still, in epic there is not usually any more elaborate attempt to trace through the train of consequences, and that train is not usually traced very far (usually it is not much more than 'Aeneas would have been killed'); it is more a device to draw attention to a critical turning-point, a 'hinge'. It is not even a full-hearted attempt to emphasise the event's contingency, as it is notable how often such cases involve an intervention by a god, an Aphrodite or an Apollo or an Athena to ensure that events turn out the way that they were always going to.¹² Even when that is not explicit, it does not take much to suspect that there was a divine dimension in the Trojans' failure to draw the obvious conclusion from that hollow clang of the spear: even if the Trojans do not realise it at the time,¹³ Aeneas is brought, rather brutally, to realise it later that same day, when Venus strips the scales from his eyes.

There is something here that we will notice in historiographic cases too, the way that often such gestures are something of a feint, a sort of *Schein*-virtuality. They come to be a way of suggesting, not that things could easily have gone differently, but that there were all sorts of forces at play to ensure that they *wouldn't*, that possibly a god, possibly something more on the human level, was always there in such a way to yank events back on course if there seemed to be a momentary danger that they might veer away; just as it was never really going to happen that Achilles would kill Agamemnon in *Iliad* 1, or that the duel of Menelaus and Paris would end the war in Book 3, or that Turnus might draw back in *Aeneid* 9. The most elaborate historiographic counterpart of this *Schein*-virtuality is Livy's musing on what would have happened if Alexander had attacked Rome (9.17–19): as Lisa Hau brings out in this volume, the whole point is that the future would not have been different at all, Alexander would have lost, and Rome would still have gone on from strength to strength.¹⁴

II

A fair number of the ancient historical instances are not very different from the epic ones, at least in the sense that they underline momentousness and do so by underlining the danger that threatened, though they may not all

have that *Schein*-element. What if the Gracchi had been closer in age to one another, or if Hannibal had invaded while Rome was still occupied with fighting the Gauls, or if Vercingetorix had led his revolt just a few years later than he did, when Rome was convulsed by civil war? (All of those are Plutarch.)¹⁵ Here too the consequences are not traced very far, as they are so obvious: if *p* had happened, Rome would have been in deep trouble; time and again, Rome was on the brink.

Or it may be rather good things that could have happened, and they can suggest the opportunity that was missed, as when Agricola crustily opines that Ireland could be conquered and held down by one legion and a few auxiliaries (Tac. *Agr.* 24.3) or when Plutarch makes 'a few Romans of the highest quality and some Greeks that were present but not taking part in the battle' of Pharsalus think of all the conquests that beckoned if only Caesar and Pompey could have joined forces and marched east:

For what Scythian cavalry or Parthian arrows or Indian wealth would have resisted 70,000 Romans attacking them in arms, with Pompey and Caesar in command, men whose name they had heard even before they heard of Rome? For such were the unapproachable and varied and savage tribes they had traversed in arms.

(Plutarch, *Pompey* 70.5)

Both those authors have subtler ways, too, of intimating similar ideas: Corbulo's wry comment *beatos quondam duces Romanos* ('lucky the Roman generals of old!') when Claudius checks his advance against rebellious northern tribes (Tac. *Ann.* 11.20.1); Plutarch's regret that internal Greek bickering called Agesilaus back from his projected eastern campaign (interestingly, in the paired *Life to Pompey*) (Plut. *Ages.* 15).

These cases also bring out how even these forward-looking what-might-have-beens have a strong backward, explanatory force as well, making it clear why those alternative futures did not happen and what did happen, did. The reader does not need it spelled out why the Roman principate left no room for its commanders to win such glory, unlike those 'Roman generals of old'; it is a jealous emperor that makes the difference. The point of Plutarch's reflections is to draw attention to the internal jealousies at Rome – as he puts it, 'the plight to which greed and rivalry had brought the empire', *Pomp.* 70.1 – which are not so different, even if more personalised and individualised, from the destructive inter-city struggles in the paired *Life* of Agesilaus. There is again something of that *Schein*-virtuality in those cases, gesturing at an alternative future that, because of those backward-looking causes, was never going to happen; but one can see the same sensibility at times when there is a future in point which might well have

happened, but would not have been different in any important ways. Just a few chapters later in the *Life of Pompey* Plutarch introduces an interlocutor who puts an awkward question to the defeated Pompey himself: would it really have been any different if you had won? Unsurprisingly, there is nothing that Pompey can say (*Pomp.* 75.5).

This idea of a *false* alternative, an alternative future that never gets off the ground, is even clearer with Plutarch's marvellous picture of Caesar at the Rubicon:

Silently, within his own mind, his thoughts veered first one way and then the other, and this was when his resolve was most shaken; and for some time he also spoke of the dilemma with his friends that were present, including Asinius Pollio – if he crossed, how great the ills which it would bring upon the world; how great the story of it they would leave among later generations. Then, finally, as if with a burst of passion, he abandoned his counsels and hurled himself forward into the path that lay before him. As he went he uttered those words which so often serve as the prelude for some incalculable risk or audacious enterprise: 'let the die be cast'.

(Plutarch, *Caesar* 32)

Even now, he could draw back (those in fact are the very words used in the parallel account in Suetonius, *etiam nunc regredi possumus...*, *Div. Iul.* 31.2): but could he, really? We know full well what drives him on; this fit of hesitation is as uncharacteristic as the mirroring second moment of dubiety at the end, when he initially plans to stay at home and postpone the fatal sitting on the Ides of March.¹⁶ The alternatives are not real alternatives, though they might be for anyone else, any more than it was a real alternative for Hector to yield to Andromache's persuasion and stay by the walls or for Achilles to stay out of the battle for good; the choice is already made. *Schein*-virtuality, indeed.

III

Let us go back to some modern counterparts, where the virtual history element can be a good deal more elaborate, and in particular an interesting volume on British history published in 2010, *A World By Itself*, edited by Jonathan Clark. Six distinguished contributors each cover a swathe of the history of the British archipelago, and each end their 40,000 words with a section on 'Some Counterfactuals', discussing what could have gone differently and what could not.

It is striking how many of their important counterfactuals centre on military history:¹⁷ the Battle of Hastings might have gone the other way,

William of Orange might not have won in 1688 and a Catholic Stuart dynasty might have survived in some (probably fairly tolerant) form, Britain could easily have lost the Second World War. The contributors are much less ready to find counterfactual possibilities on the social or political side, and that extends to the outbreak of wars (more a political thing) rather than their outcomes; this is where there is much more readiness to accept that the big political and social themes are overdetermined, and altering one variable is unlikely to make much difference to the bigger picture. The First World War broke out from the oddest circumstance, but Europe was by then a tinderbox, and some spark was sure to inflame it within a few years; women would have got the vote anyway, even if the First World War made sure they got it more quickly; Labour was well on course for replacing the Liberal party even before everything was accelerated by, again, the First World War and by the disgrace of David Lloyd George; the thirteen American colonies were never going to remain British, even though their breakaway might well have come fifty years earlier (if Britain had still been Stuart and Catholic) or fifty years later (if a more conciliatory line had been taken on both sides), though that extra fifty years might in itself have had big consequences within U.S. history for the treatment of Native Americans and for the development of slavery.¹⁸ This is not the place to discuss the historical truth of any or all those views; the point is the sort of arguments that modern historians are more or less inclined to accept.

When Clark's contributors do bring counterfactual theses into play on the political side, they tend to be rather 'Great Man' (or 'Woman') shaped, rather along the lines of Arnold Toynbee's 'If Alexander the Great had lived on'.¹⁹ Possibly Henry II (or Cromwell) might *not* have invaded Ireland; the 1980s would certainly have been different without Margaret Thatcher, for good or for ill; or – a rather different sort of example – a lot of British religious history would have been different if Catherine of Aragon had borne Henry VIII a son.²⁰ It is notable, incidentally, how few of these speculations centre on individual people's decisions that could have gone the other way,²¹ even though this is a limitation sometimes adopted as a self-denying ordinance by those who go in for virtual-history speculations;²² some do – Henry II or Cromwell and Ireland – but most are more concerned with outcomes. Still, one can quickly disappear in multiple possibilities here. It is also pointed out that three future prime ministers, Attlee, Eden, and Macmillan, fought in the trenches in the First World War; given the extraordinarily high death-rate among officers, what other potential prime ministers might there have been, and how different might their leadership have turned out to be?²³ Evidently, one cannot possibly say;

but even such speculation does remind one of the inevitable contingency of events, even in the many cases where this evades any useful analysis.

It will be interesting to go back to the ancient material and discuss whether the same distinctions – military rather than political, ‘Great Man’ (usually Great Man rather than Great Woman, but there is always Cleopatra) rather than overarching themes – apply there, but first let us take one final modern example, not as it happens from *A World by Itself* but first cousin to that last point about the First World War trenches. During the *Second* World War a lot of people in a position to know, including Churchill himself, thought the British army put up a pretty poor performance overall, compared with the navy and the air force and especially compared with the Germans; in particular, Churchill felt the army suffered from a lack of dynamic leadership. One explanation, favoured by Viscount Alanbrooke and Field Marshal Alexander among others (and they, once again, were in a position to have a well-informed view), was that too many of the potential commanders had been killed in the First World War: the German army had been much better in husbanding the lives of their brightest young officers, whereas that old-fashioned British sense of honour played a part in ensuring that the death-rate among officers was much higher than that among the ranks. Once again, I am not for the moment concerned with whether this is true or not, or how one could possibly tell. My concern here is how and where one might expect that point to be aired. It *could* be in a discussion of the First War, bringing out how momentous the British sense of honour could be in its consequences; but I dare say we might expect it to come more naturally as backward-looking in a discussion of the Second, as a First-World-War writer would have landed himself or herself in a contentious sidetrack on the deficiencies of the British army a generation later. And we would be right: I came across this in Max Hastings’ recent book on Churchill’s war leadership.²⁴

The rhetoric takes more analysis still. It is certainly using a counterfactual picture – what would have happened if British ‘husbanding’ had been different in 1914–18 – to fill in an explanatory point; but the effect is not so much to provide an explanation for an acknowledged fact but rather to provide supporting evidence why a usually unacknowledged fact – Britain’s poor army leadership – might be more credible than one would otherwise think. Hastings himself, as it happens, does not accept that explanation, though he is very keen on stressing those leadership inadequacies (and indeed quotes Alanbrooke as saying that, as Chief of the Imperial General Staff in the war, he would have liked to fire most of the commanders, except that he had nothing better to put in their place); but it does make

clear how sometimes the point of an explanation – p led to q – can be simply to make q *credible*, not just intelligible. ‘I know you won’t believe it, but if you think back a bit you’ll see that it makes a sort of sense...’

We now have some questions or possibilities formulated from the modern material as we go back to the ancient. Some will be addressed below in this chapter; others raise questions which come back later in the collection. Is it the case with ancient authors too that it is the military rather than the political which tends to elicit thoughts of how easily it could all have been different? How does Great Man thinking come into play – might it be, for instance, that the principate introduces a greater feeling of contingency, given the unmistakable impact that the personality of a single person might have?²⁵ (This recalls the familiar point that biography tends to take over from historiography as the more usual way of tracing imperial history.) And, first, can we see cases where virtual-history thinking is clearly influencing the ways that writers think about historical explanation?

IV

Polybius is particularly useful here, as he is so unusual in ‘putting in his working’ when mulling over what explains what. Let us take the familiar passage where he is criticising Fabius Pictor for his explanation of the Second Punic War. His starting-point is the claim of Fabius that it was all a matter of the ambition of Hasdrubal, the brother-in-law of Hannibal who had been assassinated in Spain in 221. Hasdrubal had been playing his own power-hungry game, and now Hannibal, his successor in Spain, was doing the same thing: it was Hannibal’s initiative, in defiance of the Carthaginian authorities, to go to war with Rome, something which began with the attack on the Spanish town of Saguntum. This is Hannibal’s War. Or so Fabius said; and – says Polybius – he is wrong, very wrong:

After saying that, Fabius reports that, once the city of Saguntum had fallen, the Romans arrived in Carthage thinking that the Carthaginians should either surrender Hannibal to them or accept war. Now, what if anyone were to ask the writer what better opportunity the Carthaginians could have had, or what course of action would have been fairer or more in their interest, if they had really (as Fabius claims) been unhappy from the outset with what Hannibal was doing? For the Carthaginians could have done what the Romans demanded, surrendering the person who was responsible for the offence, removing with good reason and at the hands of others the common enemy of their state, preserving the security of their country, and avoiding the war that threatened, all by a simple decree which would have secured justice. What could Fabius say to that? Evidently, nothing. But, far from

doing any of that, they fought for seventeen continuous years in line with what Hannibal had wanted, and did not give up the war until they had run out of all possibilities and finally endangered their whole country and the people within it.

(3.8.8–11)

The first point about this is that it is almost total rubbish – or, to say the least, strong overstatement. For one thing, Hannibal's successes at Saguntum would themselves have had an impact on Carthaginian public opinion, and any qualms would be rarer and harder to voice.²⁶ For a second, the Romans' distinctive heaviness of touch in these diplomatic exchanges is very clear (3.20–1): their demand to give up Hannibal is hardly soft diplomacy, and when the Carthaginian senate wanted to argue the rights and wrongs of Saguntum the Roman ambassadors said they were not prepared to discuss it. Whatever reservations might have been felt at Carthage about Hannibal exceeding any brief, a proud city and world power was unlikely to back down when faced with peremptory Roman demands for the surrender of a member of the royal house. Polybius' own language suggests as much: the one alternative that the Romans offered was perilous, the other humiliating (3.20.6).

Yet it can still be *intelligent* strong overstatement, and the form of the argument is particularly interesting. It is clearly influenced by that elaborate form of *eikos* argument that Greek rhetoricians had developed and that we can again see, for instance, in Antiphon's *Tetralogies*: if X was the case, would it not be reasonable, *eikos*, to think that Y would have happened too, and yet it didn't? And it is clearly using the history that didn't happen to make intelligible the history that did: they did not give up Hannibal (playing with one counterfactual, what they might have done but didn't), so that shows that it cannot have been the case that this was just Hannibal's War (another counterfactual, as far as Polybius is concerned, a view that only had purchase in Fabius' distorted imagination).

What it does do, as well, is render credible – so remember that point about Alanbrooke and Hastings, credible and not just intelligible – another important historical theme, the deep hatred of the Carthaginians for Rome. Polybius goes on to illustrate that point in a further way, with his stress on the way that they kept on fighting with such determination for so long; and he incidentally strengthens his argument by a further piece of counterfactual thinking, for had their resolution been smaller they might have given up earlier than they did. So this is a further causal point, and one that we shall see in other cases too: the way that explanatory plays with virtual history often introduce themes that are important *for something else*, that explain something beyond the immediate point.

This is not the place to go fully into the ways that Polybius does explain the outbreak of the war, and the subtle methodological dialogue that he is conducting there with Thucydides; but it is easy to see that, well before he has reached this analysis in Book 3, he has demonstrated the reasons why there is a war waiting to happen, with two peoples with expansive ambitions and lasting recriminations against one another. Lisa Hau argues later in this volume that Polybius tends to take very teleological views, with events shaping inevitably towards a certain conclusion;²⁷ that certainly fits this case, and Polybius' careful analysis of πρόφασις, αἰτία, and ἀρχή is best seen as concerned with why the war broke out *now*, rather than earlier or later. The reasons why a war was going to happen anyway go deeper, and are at least in part very Thucydidean: matters of imperialistic drive, of fierce self-interest, and of deeply entrenched emotions. Those go way beyond anything purely to do with Hasdrubal or Hannibal, or for that matter with 219 and 218 BCE.

Not that Polybius marinates everything in inevitability.²⁸ One matter of contingency is clearly important here, and that is the coincidental synchronism of the deaths of great monarchs around 220 that meant that a new phase began throughout the Mediterranean World (4.2.4–11, cf. 2.71)²⁹ – perhaps, then, a hint of Great Men, not for the only time in Polybius (Philip V will later make a big difference, for instance). And there is surely some non-inevitability when it comes to battles; in particular, Polybius emphasises the bad Roman mistakes of Flaminius at Lake Trasumene (3.80–84) and Terentius Varro at Cannae (3.110.3, 112.1–5, 116.3), and at Cannae he emphasises how much heroism there was on both sides (3.117.1). With wiser Roman generalship, it could clearly have gone the other way. Indeed, given Polybius' emphasis on the forces bearing Rome to world domination³⁰ it would be very odd to believe that he regarded every Carthaginian success as equally predetermined.

So far, then, this fits that model suggested by the modern material well enough. The grand political themes seem to be so thoroughly determined or overdetermined that the big things – the Second Punic War or Roman world-domination – would have happened anyway; but individual military outcomes could easily have been different. It is appropriate too that Polybius, as he himself explains (3.118.9–12), places his account of the Romans' constitution at the nadir of their fortunes after Cannae: for it is their political constitution and institutions that explain why they were so resilient and able to survive even so cataclysmic a reverse as that, so that this was *not* one of those contingent military outcomes that went on to have vast global consequences. It is a secular equivalent of those divine forces that could always bring matters back on course when they might seem to be veering away.

That takes us back to the example of Livy and Alexander (9.17–19), where I have already noted the *Schein*-quality. Even if an odd battle might be lost, Rome's strengths were always such as to ensure that the big picture would remain the same, one of triumph and success with only the odd contingent setback. And here too, as with Polybius' digression on the constitution, there is a point of careful collocation. Livy's narrative has now reached 319, four years after Alexander's death, and the 'natural habitat' for the digression might have been somewhere in Book 8, perhaps at Alexander's first fleeting mention at 8.3.7.³¹ What has happened in between is, of course, the disastrous battle of the Caudine Forks in 321 (9.2–6): Livy too, like Polybius, is deploying his material at the point where the times look blackest.³² In their different manners, both authors are pointing to the qualities that made Rome so resilient.

So once again counterfactual speculation is used to make points that go beyond the present context and explain something else. In this case, that 'something else' also extends to something very big indeed. One of Livy's points stresses all the things that Roman commanders had to contend with *and still usually won*, the lack of coherence given by rotation of commands, the incompetence or jealousies of colleagues, the problems of obstructive tribunes (9.18.13–17), all of them points that should on the face of it favour the Alexander side of the argument. Rather like the exchange of Xerxes and Demaratus in Herodotus (7.101–4), that points to the genuine military advantages enjoyed by an autocrat in command, even if there are also counterbalancing advantages for a state which does not have all its eggs in one regal basket. Together with the hints of civil war and the tensions that can lead to it – and that hint of civil war becomes explicit a chapter later, 9.19.15–17 – this all points way ahead, as far as Livy's own day and the one-man-rule that has left bickering tribunes and jealous power-sharers and civil conflict as, officially, features of the bad old days.

That gives a particularly interesting tweak, too, to that linkage of virtual history with the Great Man. Livy's surface point is that Rome, unlike Macedon, was not dependent on one great figure, but that further perspective is not far away – the question whether there is something to be said for the single charismatic individual after all, provided it is done in the proper, Roman way.³³

VI

What of the other great ancient example of virtual history, Herodotus' insistence that Athens was the real saviour of Greece in 480?

At this point I feel impelled to express an opinion which I am not going to keep to myself, despite the fact that it will offend a great many people, because I believe it to be true. If the Athenians had taken fright at the danger that was bearing down on them and had abandoned their country, or if they had stayed put where they were and had surrendered to Xerxes, no one would have tried to resist Xerxes at sea. What would have happened on land, then? Even if the Peloponnesians had built wall after defensive wall across the Isthmus, the Lacedaemonians would still have been let down by their allies, not out of deliberate treachery, but because they would have had no choice, in the sense that they would have fallen one by one to the Persian fleet. So the Lacedaemonians would have been left all alone, and in that situation they would have fought bravely and well – and died nobly. Or an alternative scenario, instead of this one, is that before matters went this far they would have seen that the rest of Greece was collaborating with the Persians and so they would have come to terms with Xerxes. But in either case Greece would have come under Persian rule, because I cannot see what good defensive walls built across the Isthmus would have done with Xerxes controlling the sea.

As things are, however, anyone who claims that the Athenians became the saviours of Greece would be perfectly correct, because the scales were bound to tilt in favour of whichever side Athens joined. Once they had decided that their preference was for Greece to remain free, it was they who aroused the whole of the rest of Greece (except those places which were already collaborating with the Persians) and, second only to the gods, repelled the king's advance. Not even the fearsome and alarming oracles that came from Delphi persuaded them to abandon Greece; they held firm and found the courage to withstand the invader of their country.

(Hdt. 7.139, tr. Waterfield, mildly adapted)

There is nothing *Schein*-like about these alternative scenarios. A repeated theme in the later books of Herodotus is how easily all this could have happened, how close Greece came to losing: this is *Sein*-virtuality, indeed, what other contributors to this volume call 'sideshadowing',³⁴ sketching alongside the narrative an alternative story that could easily have happened.³⁵ δρησιμός, the perpetual likelihood that the Greeks might 'run away', becomes a crucial word, an ironic sequel to that glorious δρόμος that the Athenians and Plataeans showed when they ran to face the intimidatingly dressed Persians at Marathon (6.112.2).³⁶ That fits the general picture that we have seen before: the *outbreak* of the war may be over-determined, as Greece has been signalled as the final target of Persian

expansion for a very long time, at least from Book 3 and Atossa's bedroom talk with Darius – so, importantly, from some time before the provocation of the Ionian Revolt. Since then Greece has been seen as 'immer das letzte', as Ludwig Huber finely put it,³⁷ always the final step in Persian expansion that the earlier moves are arcing towards. But the *outcome* of the war is anything but predetermined, and could so easily have gone the other way. The Greeks indeed had a lot to thank the Athenians for, and (the narrative goes on to show) one individual Athenian in particular, the great Themistocles; so once again, as Emily Baragwanath makes clear later in this volume, Great Man history and counterfactual speculation are hunting closely together.

Just as striking is the way that this praise of Athens as the 'saviours of Greece' does not take the form that we might expect, or that the Athenians would have liked. We could all write the fine phrases to be expected here: Athens as a beacon of freedom, the model of resolve for all the others, the city that would never have given capitulation a second thought. We do not even have to write them ourselves: Herodotus has done it for us, in the great language he gives the Athenians at the end of Book 8 – 'as long as the sun keeps to its present course' or 'as long as even a single Athenian remains alive, we will never come to terms with Xerxes' (8.143.2, 144.3). We can trace such rhetoric in Thucydides (1.73.4, cf. 6.83.1), in Lysias (2.23–4), and elsewhere. And fine phrases are ringing in our ears as we read or hear the 7.139 passage itself, as only a few chapters earlier we have those proud words of the envoys to the uncomprehending Persians: if you knew freedom the way we know freedom, you would tell us to fight for it not just with staves but even with axes (7.135.3). But those are *Spartan* envoys, not Athenians, and here it is made very clear that the Athenians might well have chosen the other way; the point was that, whichever way they chose, that was likely to be crucial. The ones that would probably have held out were indeed the Spartans, and they would have died heroically – that is the sort of thing that Spartans do, after all; or possibly they would not, and even they would have gone over.

This is 'offensive' (ἐπιφθονον), says Herodotus, to the majority of readers: and we know why, because Athens has become so unpopular since those times of Greek unity. Here too a melody along those lines has just been played, with a flash-forward to an event 'many years later, in the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians' (7.137.1), that war that came once Athens had assumed its role as the successor to Persia as the new tyrant aggressor. There is a certain amount here of what Luke Pitcher calls 'author theatre'³⁸ – in this case, the self-dramatising of the figure who is prepared to stand up and say what he thinks, no matter how unpopular

it may be. But it is not just Athens' critics who will find such points unwelcome; Athenians too are unlikely to find it to their taste either, as they are reminded that their moral high ground was not as slipsure as all that; any more than they will have been overwhelmed with gratitude when they reached the beginning of Book 9, so soon after those wonderful words at the end of Book 8, and find the Athenians talking about capitulation anyway.

So once again a virtual history passage is pointing to an important explanatory theme that goes beyond the surface causal point of 'the Athenians saved Greece'. We also are reminded of the perpetual Greek tendency to fragmentation, and how much that explains of the history that is still to come. To return to our initial comparison, we can compare the way that fictional pictures of a Hitler victory became less celebratory of British values once a generation had passed, and writers began (in Rosenfeld's phrasing) to 'de-heroise' the Finest Hour rhetoric and 'to question the nation's self-congratulatory myths and create a new sense of national identity', one with a good deal less 'British exceptionalism' about it. Would, in fact, Britain have responded to German occupation with any less acquiescence than other nations? Would that trumpeted commitment to freedom have lasted the course? Rosenfeld plots such realistic doubts against a changing reaction of writers to their own, later times, with less confidence in any lasting qualities that could promise a brighter future.³⁹ Once again the analogy is not far to seek: Herodotus and his contemporaries could easily have felt something similar as the Peloponnesian War came looming upon them. Not, of course, that Herodotus 'de-heroizes' the successes of 490 and 480–79; anything but. Those that died well at Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis are given their literary memorial here; these, pre-eminently, are among the 'wondrous doings' that his proem promises. We can still sense – indeed, he parades – that revisionism in his counterfactuality, one that prods his Greek readers and listeners to rethink exactly what it was that was wondrous and that they should be so proud about. Is it not partly that they, like Livy's non-monarchical Romans, managed to overcome so many debilitating factors that should have told the other way?

There are other ways, too, in which the Herodotus passage is working hard. It introduces a further important explanatory theme, this time a strategic and logistical one: the way that the Peloponnesian wall would be totally useless if the Persians had sea-domination.⁴⁰ It prepares for another causal theme as well, the paradoxical way that it was largely *because* such 'running away' was always on the cards that Greece eventually won: when Themistocles – and that is another contextual point, for the Great Man's

entry comes just a few chapters after our passage at 7.143⁴¹ – threatens Eurybiades that the Athenians will desert the cause and sail away to Siris in Italy (8.62.2), he has to be taken seriously as that further piece of virtual history is all too easy to believe; and when Sicinnus inserts so much of the truth into his message to Xerxes, that again is highly credible – the Greeks *are* thinking of ‘running away’, as Sicinnus says, and there is every reason for the king to attack quickly if he wants to catch them at Salamis (8.75.3); every reason too for Xerxes to believe Sicinnus when he says that Themistocles ‘is on the Persian king’s side and wants you rather than the Greek side to be victorious’ (8.75.2), which is not true of Themistocles but is true of rather a lot of others. ‘But for’ that credibility of Greek fragmentation, the battle of Salamis might never have been fought. It is not just the uplifting, inspiring side of freedom but also its downside, the perpetual likelihood that every city may go its own free and individualistic way, that eventually secures freedom’s victory.

There is one last paradox. The Athenians are not in fact going to sail away to Siris, but they are going to take to the ships, abandon their city, and sail to Salamis and Troezen and Aegina: so an off-key version of that fragmentation turns out to play a part in the eventual Athenian contribution to victory. By a further paradox again, this autochthonous people who make so much of their love of their land show that love by being prepared, for the moment, to give it up, a most unexpected scenario that turns out to be, not virtual, but real.⁴²

VII

Let me end by moving from the sublime, Polybius, Livy, and Herodotus, to – myself. These are the last two paragraphs of my chapter in the revised *Cambridge Ancient History*.

Antony and Cleopatra might well have won the Actium campaign. If they had, the task of settling the world would in some ways have been easier for them. Their marriage – for marriage, unequivocally, it would then have been – would provide a most attractive register to describe and suggest a new harmony of West and East. That would be particularly true in any culture which thought of its royalty as gods: this would be a divine marriage, a most certain guarantee of the world’s prosperity. But such cultures were the cultures of the East: Antony and Cleopatra would be both gods and monarchs, and the fate of Iulius Caesar made clear how sensitive such topics were in Rome... The union of the Greco-Roman world was always a precarious thing, and it is hard to think that it could have survived the continuing dominion of Cleopatra and Antony. Looking a generation ahead,

one could see what might happen: two worlds, not one, with Antyllus (perhaps) succeeding to some sort of control in the West, and Caesarion a more traditional monarch in the East. Or rather, that was the best that could be hoped for; a further debilitating series of revolts and civil wars, once again fought out in Italy and Greece, was just as likely. And no one could see what would emerge at the end...

Now [in contrast to *CAH*^{x1}, written in the political climate of the thirties] the story is once again told, not as Octavian's triumph, but as the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra. But, still, they could not have coped with success, and Octavian could: his mastery of Italian propaganda may not have won him the war, but it did much to win the ensuing peace. For Rome, the right man won.

(Pelling 1996, 66–7)

I apologise for the egotism, but much of this paper has already been concerned, in the usual thinly disguised way, with authorial intentions, even though it has avoided such critical language; yet our views of how a text makes sense are (if one thinks about it) parasitic on our assumptions of how a real-life human mind may be assumed to find features of that text coherent, and the most relevant mind is that of the author, taking account as authors do of how readers and hearers are likely to find those same features. Not that such authorial thinking need be explicitly articulated; indeed, until writing this paper I had never asked myself quite what I was doing when writing those paragraphs. Still, now that I have, others too may find it interesting to know about the one authorial mindset I know best.

First, there was some author theatre here as well, whether or not I admitted it to myself. I was deeply aware that, in institutional terms, I was not a historian at all; one of the features of *CAH*², picked up by Emma Dench in her chapter in Feldherr's *Companion*,⁴³ was that the more regular historians sometimes fought shy of writing narratives, leaving it to literary types like me. There was some defensiveness in my desire to show that even delicate literary flowers can occasionally play with the historical Big Questions. A more respectable motive, shared by the contributors to the present volume, was to fight against the natural tendency of hindsight to think that what happened was always going to happen; but 'Antony and Cleopatra might well have won the Actium campaign...' – and note again that the narrative of uncertainty plays around a military rather than political outcome, though unlike Cannae and the Caudine Forks this would have been one with long-term political consequences as well.⁴⁴ My narrative had played down the sorts of political factor which, others had argued, made Octavian's victory predictable, especially his manipulation of Italian public opinion; now that aspect could be given a different inflection in glancing forward to what lay ahead, with something of a Great Man emphasis on his

political skills – ‘*bis*’ (as I put it, without thinking too hard about, say, Maecenas) ‘mastery of Italian propaganda’. It did not fall within the rubric of that chapter, but that left it open for a reader to muse on other counterfactual possibilities for those future years: what if Augustus had died young, for instance, the question put a few years later by Holger Sonnabend?⁴⁵ So I too was taking the opportunity offered by virtual history to suggest a point about something else, in this case the Augustan principate rather than the triumviral period.

Reading history also involves empathy, and I wanted to push readers into the imaginative leap of asking what side they would have been on themselves, if they had been in the thick of it and had to plump for the future that they would prefer to see, and to re-examine their own Great Man and Woman sympathies as I thought they might have emerged from reading the narrative (‘the tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra’). That is a sort of double process of empathetic involvement and self-monitoring that is increasingly stressed in criticism of the ancient historians: several recent analyses of Tacitus have taken that direction.⁴⁶

Not least, there was also the simple desire for a resonant conclusion, going out with a bit of a bang, and mixing a feeling of the closure of one story with the opening of another. This was after all only chapter 1 of a very long volume, and Erich Gruen was about to start the Augustan narrative a few pages later. Ending is a favoured modern position for counterfactuality, mixing retrospection, summary, and a certain authorial loftiness: that *World by Itself* collection similarly placed its what-if speculations at the close of each chapter. Ancient sensibilities were less attuned to the grand concluding gesture,⁴⁷ but we have also seen ways in which Herodotus, Polybius, and Livy placed their counterfactual speculations in contexts that were anything but casual. So here too, perhaps, this authorial trick is nothing particularly new. Closure is always tricky; but ‘For Rome, the right man won’ – that, perhaps, will do.⁴⁸

Notes

¹ At least, I like it, though Niall Ferguson does not: Ferguson 1997, 7. The genre is briefly surveyed by Andrew Roberts, reviewing a reissue of Brown–Serpell (1941), in *TLS* for 13 November 2009.

² Thus Harris is not the only writer of counterfactual fiction to make Joseph Kennedy President: A. Edward Cooper did the same in his *Triumph of the Third Reich* (1999), though Cooper’s Kennedy becomes President as early as 1948. Cf. Rosenfeld 2005, 151–2.

³ Harris 1992, 85–6.

⁴ That *Troades* debate may well have been constructed with Gorgias, or at least with Gorgias-type argumentation, in mind. Notice especially Hecuba at *Tro.* 998: ‘you say my son took you away by force’. In fact Euripides’ Helen has *not* said that, but Gorgias’ Helen had (§7). Admittedly, it would take an alert audience-member to notice that

and think immediately of Gorgias in particular; it is rather that listeners' familiarity with the argument made it easier for the inconcinnity to pass unnoticed.

⁵ See Powell 1980, esp. 106–110 for a thoughtful argument that over-determination is both more frequent and more theoretically important than practising historians usually allow.

⁶ I pursue these theoretical issues further in a book on *How the Greek Historians Explained History*, to be published by the University of Texas press.

⁷ In the Edinburgh conference John Matthews made a similar point in discussing alternative might-have-beens concerning Augustus. On that theme see also Sonnabend 2000.

⁸ Cf. e.g. *Il.* 3.373–4, 6.73–6, Virg. *Aen.* 9.757–61 with the note of Hardie 1994, 234.

⁹ Reinhardt 1961, 107 ff. ('Episches "Fast"'); Nesselrath 1992 ('*Beinahe*-Episoden'). Cf. de Jong 1987, 68–81 on 'if-not' situations in the *Iliad*: these form the biggest subclass of such *Beinahe*-episodes. For equivalent formulations in Herodotus, cf. Hornblower 2004, 306; in Thucydides, Hornblower 1994, 158–9 = 2011, 89–90; 2008, 1030–1; and 2011, 7–11.

¹⁰ Nesselrath 1992, 10: 46 cases in the *Iliad* where 'a particular plot-development possibility is described until shortly before it eventuates, but is then broken off': then pp. 29 (*Odyssey*), 75 (*Aeneid*). He also found 13 in Apollonius Rhodius (p. 44), 45 in Silius Italicus (p. 107), 22 in Statius' *Thebaid* (p. 123), 38 in Quintus of Smyrna (p. 53), and 30 in Nonnus (p. 67). The Homeric cases are analysed more fully by Kelly 2007, 128–32, quoting at 129 n. 1 the nice comment of Σ bT on 8.217: the poet 'continually draws dangers on to a climax, engaging the listener in anticipation and then immediately applying the remedy'. Cowan 2010 now offers a more elaborate and very thought-provoking analysis of counterfactual thinking in Silius Italicus: cf. nn. 12 and 14.

¹¹ Cf. Hollis 1970, 79 on 8.347–9, citing also 376–7 and 409–10.

¹² Though Nesselrath 1992, 6, 11 n. 16 rightly emphasises that it is not always a god; a powerful human intervention can have a similar effect (e.g. *Il.* 5.679–80, 8.90–1). Similar remarks in Cowan 2010, esp. 327–8, but he argues that Silius Italicus 'tends to move towards a true poetics of contingency' (334), one where outcomes are more genuinely open.

¹³ Notice the beautiful ambiguity of 'et, si fata deum, si mens non laeua fuisset...': whose *mens*? The gods', as taken e.g. by David West in his Penguin translation ('If divine Fate, if the minds of the gods had not been set against us')? Or the Trojans' own, as Servius took it? Cf. Austin 1964, 50 ad loc.

¹⁴ Hau, this volume, pp. 75–7. Cowan's analysis is again interesting here (cf. nn. 10 and 12): he brings out that in Silius Italicus, too, divergent outcomes often tend disconcertingly towards the same end, but in that case an end that is different from the one that actually occurred.

¹⁵ Gracchi: *Gracch.* 3.2. Hannibal: *Marc.* 3.2. Vercingetorix: *Caes.* 26.2. Other Plutarchan examples are *Ant.* 50.4, *Demetr.* 28.3, *Flam.* 9.9–11, *Gracch.* 7.7, *Comparison of Nicias and Crassus* 4.3, *Lucull.* 36.5, *On the Fortune of the Romans* 321f–322a. Livy too likes such speculation: instances are listed by Oakley 1997–2005, iii.205–6.

¹⁶ More about this in Pelling 2011, 312–5 and 473–4.

¹⁷ Similar remarks in Cowan 2010, esp. 324 and 340. This pattern also fits Ferguson 1992: most of the 'What if?' questions raised in that collection centre on wars – World War I and II, the American Revolution – or Great Man questions ('What if Charles I had avoided the Civil War?' 'What if John F. Kennedy had lived?' 'What would have

happened in 1989 without Gorbachev?'). The first of Cowley's *What If?* collections (1999) has *Military Historians* in its title; the second explicitly moves away from this emphasis (2001, xvi), but still many of the imaginary scenarios are heavily war-based – 'Not by a nose: the triumph of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium' (n. 44 below), 'repulse at Hastings, October 14, 1066', 'The war of 1938: Chamberlain fails to sway Hitler at Munich', 'Enigma untracked', 'No bomb: no end' (in 1945).

¹⁸ Battle of Hastings: Campbell 2010, 107. William of Orange: Clark 2010b, 444–5. Second World War: Skidelsky 2010, 688. First World War and the tinderbox of Europe in 1914: Rubinstein 2010, 563. Female franchise: Rubinstein 2010, 562. Liberal party replacing Labour: Rubinstein 2010, 561–2. American War of Independence: Clark 2010, 445–6.

¹⁹ Toynbee 1969. Toynbee casts his essay as the reflections of a twentieth-century historian writing under Alexander LXXXVI, doubtless in the Museum of the world-centre Alexandria. By a particular tour-de-force, this fictive historian includes several speculations about what is for him a thoroughly unlikely alternative history, including for instance a Carthaginian invasion of Italy across the Alps and the persistence of an obscure group of fanatical Yahweh-worshippers. In the world of Alexander LXXXVI, a diluted form of Buddhism rules.

²⁰ Henry II and Ireland: Gillingham 2010, 218. Margaret Thatcher: cf. Skidelsky 2010, 670–8. Catherine of Aragon: Wormald 2010, 328.

²¹ This is the basis of Weber's distinction (2000, 15) between 'Alternative Geschichte' and 'Ungeschehene Geschichte': for him 'Alternative Geschichte' starts from specific situations, 'especially decisions', where alternative courses might have been taken, whereas 'Ungeschehene Geschichte' starts from real life and speculates on how it might have been different.

²² Ferguson 1992 begins with such a self-denying ordinance only to consider options that were genuinely considered at the time; but speculation soon spins way beyond such restrictions, especially in his final chapter.

²³ Rubinstein 2010, 562–3.

²⁴ Hastings 2009, 262–3.

²⁵ Or, at least, a particular *form* of contingency, an awareness that massive consequences may follow from the character that an emperor happens to have. That may co-exist with a tendency to regard the principate itself as more inevitable and less contingent than it in fact was, or at least than it had been in its early years: on this see Low, ch. 9 below, esp. pp. 206–7, 212.

²⁶ Thus Meister 1975, 42–7, emphasising the overstatement but insisting (very reasonably) that Polybius' analysis is still superior to what we can reconstruct of Fabius'.

²⁷ Hau, p. 74. I return to this point in the book mentioned in n. 6.

²⁸ See Maier in this volume.

²⁹ Cf. Walbank 1957–79, i. 229 on 2.41.1.

³⁰ Cf. Hau, p. 74.

³¹ Oakley 1997–2005, iii.193; Morello 2002, 64 ('natural habitat') – though Morello's own view is much subtler, 69–74. The impressive list of Alexander's potential Roman adversaries also shows some straining: few were sufficiently exact contemporaries (Breitenbach 1969, 148; Oakley 1997–2005, iii.190).

³² Oakley 1997–2005, iii.196–7.

³³ So Oakley 1997–2005; iii.198–9 and e.g. Breitenbach 1969, esp. 150–51; Santoro

L'Hoir 1990, 240–1. Morello 2002, 80–3 accepts the contemporary resonance, but reads it differently.

³⁴ The word is owed to Morson 1994, and was immediately used also by Bernstein 1994 (acknowledging it as Morson's coinage, p. xi). It is gaining currency in classical circles: see also Cowan 2010 and Grethlein 2010.

³⁵ For other instances where Herodotus stresses that events could have turned out very differently, see Hornblower 2004, 301–6; for similar cases in Thucydides, Rood 1998, 278–80.

³⁶ 8.4.1, 18, 23.1, 60.1, 75.2, 80.2. Plutarch found this notion most offensive, *de Mal. Hdt.* 867d–e: cf. Baragwanath, this volume, p. 36. But by a further irony the real 'runner away' is then Xerxes, 8.97.1, 100.1.

³⁷ Huber 1963, 128.

³⁸ Pitcher 2009, esp. 34–9.

³⁹ Rosenfeld 2005, ch. 1 (quotations from pp. 50, 75, and 83). His ch. 2 then traces a similar but not identical development in American fiction: one distinctive, though limited and highly controversial, strand in the American material has been speculation whether the United States would have done better to stay out of the European war, preferring to let an initially victorious Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union fight one another into the ground – a different sort of revisionism.

⁴⁰ Cf. Demaratus' advice about Cythera at 7.235 and esp. Chileus' sombre insight at 9.9.2; Baragwanath, pp. 38–9. There are subtle ways too in which the narrative of Thermopylae and Artemisium intimates the uselessness of walls and the value of sea-power when there is a threat of naval outflanking: Bowie 2006, 133–5.

⁴¹ 'A charismatic individual is in the right place at the opportune moment', Baragwanath p. 44 n. 38.

⁴² Pelling 2009.

⁴³ Dench 2009, 405.

⁴⁴ For a rosier view of what these consequences might have been, see Ober 2001.

⁴⁵ Sonnabend 2000.

⁴⁶ Including some of my own: Pelling 2010, esp. 383. Cf. esp. Levene 1997.

⁴⁷ West 2007.

⁴⁸ After initial performance in Edinburgh, further versions of this paper were given in Reading, Oxford, and Ravenstein at various dates in 2011–12: my thanks to all these audiences for helpful comments, and especially to Katherine Harloe, Ed Bispham, Emily Baragwanath, Kai Brodersen, Richard Rutherford, and Anton Powell.

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HERODOTOS AND THE AVOIDANCE OF HINDSIGHT

Emily Baragwanath

Oral traditions regarding past events are reconfigured over time in response to the needs and experiences of those responsible for their transmission.¹ Shaped and preserved in light of the present, they are of their nature retrospective. Contemporary realities of the mid- to late fifth-century BC (and earlier) have, accordingly, left their mark on the traditions that underpin Herodotos' *Histories*, and they have also influenced Herodotos' shaping of his monumental work.² The work itself moreover encodes the truth that meaningful history can *only* be written in retrospect. This truth is implied by Solon's advice to 'look to the end' (1.32.9), and it dawns on Kroisos (Carolyn Dewald observes) as he shouts out Solon's name as the flames begin to lick his pyre.³ The *Histories*' ambivalent ending was perhaps designed to empower future readers – from their vantage point of greater hindsight than that available to Herodotos – to impute appropriate meaning to the event that occurs at the end of the *Histories*, the Athenian siege and eventual capture of Sestos (9.114–20, cp. Thuc. 1.89.2),⁴ with the question it implicitly raises: was the Athenian empire a good or bad thing? (Dewald 1997, 80–82).

And yet Herodotos is surprisingly loath to mention explicitly the provisional end-point of his history represented by events of his time of writing (c. 450–430 BC),⁵ or explicitly to use those events to buttress his historical judgments about earlier history. In this text that abounds with explicit references of other sorts to the historian's own day – references to material objects, communities, cultural practices and so forth that continued down to Herodotos' own time – there are strikingly few direct references to events that occurred later than 479/8 BC, the lower limit of the *campo historico erodoteo*.⁶ Only a couple of times does Herodotos refer directly to the defining historical event of his own day, the Peloponnesian War.⁷ Aside from the charged remark at 8.3.1, where he explicitly recalls 'what happened later' after the Athenians had deprived the Lakedaimonians of hegemony in the years following the Persian Wars,⁸ he refers only

obliquely to the contemporary Athenian empire (as in the reference to Sestos).⁹ He includes no comment for example on how Athens' newly developing skills at sea will be the underpinning of her naval empire; no explicit glance forward (though he dwells on their significance in the past) to the significance Athens' walls would have in the fifth century.¹⁰ And while fifth-century readers might well have seen reflected in the depiction of Persia the Athenian *archē* of their own day, later audiences could just as easily find analogies with other empires and powers closer to them.¹¹

Within the temporal bounds of the *Histories*' main trunk narrative – from Persia's imperial expansion in the time of Cyrus down to the end of the Persian Wars – we in fact find recourse to a strategy that might be described as the (selective) *avoidance* of hindsight. Against the invocation of 'what had to be',¹² and the historical datum (familiar to readers at least in its broad outlines) of how things actually turned out, Herodotos sets alternative, counterfactual narratives. Such emphasis on alternative future possibilities that existed in the past demonstrates that – even though in hindsight the past may seem to unfold in logical plotlines toward an inevitable conclusion – these historical occurrences did not in fact seem preordained or unavoidable at the time, and a different result might have been achieved.¹³ Beyond preserving a sense of contingency, the selective avoidance of hindsight at key narrative moments is also dramatically effective: Herodotos thus keeps his readers on the edge of their seats, encouraging them to suspend their expectations and be held in the thrall of the story as it unfolds,¹⁴ despite their knowledge of the outcome.¹⁵

1. The roads not taken

The evocation of historical – and narrative – roads¹⁶ that ultimately are not taken is a distinctive characteristic of Herodotos' *Histories*. In its profound dialogism,¹⁷ the *Histories* not only contains within it a profusion of voices that recount stories and alternative versions of those stories: it also points repeatedly to narratives that lie beyond the confines of the text and are not recounted, but awareness of which lends perspective and context, and in other ways enhances readers' engagement with the work. These alternative narratives may be details that Herodotos indicates he knows but chooses not to recount, such as the names of the rest of the three hundred who fought and died at Thermopylai (thus he signals their importance yet avoids an exhaustive catalogue). Or they may be versions he has judged less credible and omitted, as when, after recounting the death of Cyrus, he mentions the 'many other stories told', of which he has selected 'the most persuasive' (1.214.5). Reference to such narratives left unelaborated

displays the historian's control over his account – his discernment in selecting and shaping the version he does – and points to the breadth of his knowledge. It also alerts readers to the complexity of the historical record: to the broader tradition, with its alternative versions and interpretations. Other instances highlight the uncertainty of historical information, as in Herodotos' observation that Hamilcar vanished 'either in the way the Phoenicians tell' (the version he has just recounted), 'or in some other way' (7.167.2). Elsewhere what remains unspecified may be details that lie beyond the grasp of historian or reader, as when Herodotos stretches readers' imaginations to envisage what is 'greater than words' – such as the overwhelmingly large number of attendants attached to Xerxes' army.¹⁸ Similarly the frequent expression *τά τε ἄλλα καί...* ('both other things and especially...') suggests unspecified further narratives, opening up a broader background before Herodotos focuses on a particular aspect. At 8.52 for example the Athenians still in the city 'defended themselves by other counter devices and especially (*καὶ δὴ καί*)' rolled down large boulders when the Persians attacked the gates: readers are invited to use their imaginations to heighten the vividness of the scene, filling in details of further ways in which the defenders fought back.¹⁹ Thus Herodotos invites reflection on a profusion of untold narratives in the form of unspecified possibilities, which expand readers' imaginative horizons and suggest a broader background against which to contextualize the ensuing narrative. That the unspecified 'other things' may be important in themselves (not *only* serving to highlight what follows) is suggested by the function of this same expression in Herodotos' opening sentence,²⁰ where it looks forward to the many elements of the *Histories* that are not directly related to the war between Greeks and Persians. The ethnographical material, for example, which turns out to dominate much of the *Histories*, widens the frame of the work and supplies context that helps readers grasp the significance of the war.

But beyond narrative 'roads not taken' in the form of occurrences that are not related, or versions that are mentioned but not elaborated, is a different type of road not taken, the one with which we began: the subset of what did not in fact happen but *could* very well have happened. Herodotos concludes the *Histories* by presenting such a one (the possibility that the Persians in the time of Cyrus might have relocated to gentler climes and become slaves to others: 9.122). In pointing to such roads not taken the historian delves into virtual history. Awareness of alternative possible histories is an important dimension of any historical account, since all statements about causality contain implicit counterfactual claims, and any event that occurs and is narrated may be regarded as implying the

possibility that it might not have happened, or might not have happened in the way it did. (Of course, fictional or pseudo-historical narratives may do the same.) Some counterfactuals are more significant than others, however, including especially those that influenced subsequent events: those that seemed possible to the actors at the time, who therefore shaped their actions accordingly. (We might think of the *poleis* that medized in the Persian wars, on the assumption that Xerxes would come out top.) Others are revealed as significant because the author draws attention to them as representing, in hindsight, potential hinges of history. In Homer, what scholars have termed ‘nearly’ episodes, the ‘epic almost’, or ‘*if not*-situations’, can have various effects, but important among them is how they may invite readers to dwell on what might have been had the action not occurred.²¹ Counterfactuals in historical works, beyond their dramatic function, likewise help produce a dynamic history that includes a sense of possibilities that were open at the time, and place what *did* happen in a different, more informed perspective. The other types of narrative ‘roads not taken’ in the *Histories*, mentioned above (pp. 26–7), condition readers’ responses to the counterfactuals, encouraging an imaginative, expansive approach, one keen to ponder the implications of such unrealized possibilities.

The *Histories*’ most famous counterfactual is that of 7.139. In the course of recounting Xerxes’ advance towards Greece Herodotos has just described the attitude of various Greek cities, most of which had paid tribute to the Great King and were set to medize, and at this point he leaps forward in time to present his retrospective judgment on the entire war, and articulates a detailed counterfactual argument explaining his opinion that the Athenians were saviours of Greece in the Persian Wars.²² First he observes, through a list of unfulfilled conditionals, what the Athenians did *not* do: ‘If they had *been panic-struck* at the approaching danger and *abandoned their land*, or even had not abandoned it but *had remained and surrendered themselves to Xerxes*’ – none would have opposed him by sea, and defence by land would have been useless. With their allies capitulating city by city to Xerxes’ fleet, the Spartans would have been left alone, either to fight a noble fight and perish, or to medize themselves. Herodotos then presents the opinion he expects to be displeasing (ἐπίφθονος) to most people (7.139.1, a comment that highlights the retrospective nature of the assessment): that the Athenians were saviours of Greece (σωτήρας...τῆς Ἑλλάδος), since they chose that Greece survive free (ἐλόμενοι δὲ τὴν Ἑλλάδα περιεῖναι ἐλευθέρην).²³

Aside from this explicit authorial counterfactual, however, Herodotos’ text in many ways implicitly evokes narratives of what might have been:

alternative narratives that are not recounted as part of the march of events, nor given explicit authorial sanction as hypothetical past possibilities, and yet whose significance is made crystal clear, for they describe a virtual history wholly different from what actually happened. Herodotos highlights these alternative narratives in various ways. Most notable is the articulation rather than elision of choices that were open in the past about future courses of action. Rather than simply recounting the key events that occurred, the historian slows down the narrative pace to describe the process of decision-making that preceded them, with – crucially – the inclusion of direct speeches. Via direct speech Herodotos, at key moments of his narrative, downplays hindsight so as to transport readers back to a moment in time when a different future loomed from the one that would actually eventuate. Choices determining a different future are on the point of being taken (or even provisionally decided); the direct discourse of characters (and of the Delphic oracle) indeed evokes a future that from their perspective in time appears certain: a future of defeat. Herodotos' presentation highlights the fact that a *different* road was very nearly chosen, and details the ramifications that would have had: for these alternative narratives involve choices and actions that issue in heavy consequences.

The alternative narratives generated by the depiction of actions that were open to be chosen in the past, but were ultimately evaded, may be highlighted further by the text's illustration of other kinds of 'roads not taken': advice that was rejected, fears and expectations that were not fulfilled, charges that did not result in punishment, oracles that remained unfulfilled, and so forth. I shall suggest that the individual alternative narratives that I am focusing on combine to generate the master alternative narrative of Herodotos' *Histories*: that of the defeat and enslavement of Greece.²⁴ Together, these alternative narratives are perhaps just as powerful in their effect on the reader as the famous explicit counterfactual – which itself crystallizes and clarifies what they imply, even as it in turn is developed and nuanced by them. Thus the 'roads not taken' of the wider text develop the strands opened up in 7.139, deepening and complicating the judgment about the Athenians as saviours of Greece. The wider narrative is inflected differently, with its emphasis on the *fragility* of salvation: only by a hair's breadth did the conditions relating to the Athenians remain unfulfilled. Even as the narrator's explicit commentary at 7.139 glosses swiftly over the possibilities of Athenian abandonment of their land or surrender, the wider account thus brings them vividly before readers' eyes as possibilities that very nearly were realized.²⁵

Such evocation of alternative possible futures is a dramatic device that builds up suspense and spotlights the importance of what actually

happened and, accordingly, its worth as a subject of history. But it also plays an important role in developing Herodotos' portrayal of the Athenians. In the portrayal of the Athenians' *near* failure to be the saviours they were, it becomes clear that Herodotos well understood what William Empson, the literary critic, meant when he observed in more recent times that

people, often, cannot have done both of two things, but they must have been in some way prepared to have done either; ...they are only to be understood by bearing both possibilities in mind (1930, 44).

The counterfactuals help develop a characterization of the Athenians that is more balanced than the rosy-eyed view found in Attic oratory, but nonetheless counters contemporary pressure not to recognize Athens' role.²⁶ To this extent they suggest that the perspective from hindsight – assessing Athens in light of her later imperialism – should be tempered.

2. Marathon

I begin by considering Herodotos' presentation of the first significant road not taken by the Athenians in 490 BC: to surrender to the Persians rather than to fight at Marathon.

Athens had sent twenty ships, 'the beginning of evils', as Herodotos described them (5.97.3), to assist in the Ionian revolt, accompanied by five ships sent by a second Greek city, Eretria on Euboeia. After the Ionians' sack of Sardis, Darius had instructed his attendant to remind him at dinner every day to 'remember the Athenians' (5.105.2). At the failure of a first retaliatory mission, headed by Mardonios and directed against both Eretria and Athens (ἐπὶ τε Ἐρετρίαν καὶ Ἀθήνας, 6.43.4), and with the broader goal of subduing as many of the Greek cities as possible (6.44.1), Darius appointed replacement commanders, Datis and Artaphrenes, to lead armies against the same two cities, charging them to enslave each of them and bring the slaves into his presence (6.94.2). This expedition embarked from Ionia and sailed across the Icarian sea, hopping from island to island, subduing some and raising an army and gathering hostages from others. At this point Herodotos recounts Eretria's response to Persia's approach and attack (to the details of which we return below), and the Persians' eventual plundering and burning of their temples and enslavement of the population, in accordance with Darius' command. After delaying some days they sail for Athens, 'expecting' (δοκέοντες), Herodotos says, 'that they would do the same thing to the Athenians as they had done to the Eretrians' (6.102). The ascription of motivation invokes the Persians' perspective to underscore the parallelism that has already surfaced between

Eretria and Athens, the twin cities subject to Darius' ire. And, indeed, the account of Marathon that ensues implies that Athens only narrowly escaped the fate suffered by Eretria.

Plutarch in his work *On the Malice of Herodotos* bemoaned that Herodotos' account of the Marathon campaign dwells more on the circumstances surrounding it than on the battle itself: the upshot, in his view, of Herodotos' failure to depict it as a decisive victory, and especially of his obsessive focus on the notorious shield signal incident (discussed below, p. 32), is that 'the greatness of the victory is gone and the climax of this famous exploit has come to nothing' (862d). Plutarch might equally have noted the spectacle of internal deliberations marked by strife that Herodotos included in his sketch of what preceded the Athenians' decision to fight. Rather than simply relating the historical outcome – the battle of Marathon – Herodotos offers a detailed account that underscores just how close the Athenians came to making a different choice, taking a different road, which would have led to wholly different consequences. The drawn-out presentation prompts readers to think back to the time, by slowing down the account to stage the future outcomes that were once on the cards. For the opinions of the ten Athenian generals were divided (δίχα, 6.109.1): half shrank from fighting the Persians on the grounds of being too few, while half – including Miltiades – were determined to fight. The worse opinion, ἡ χείρων, was in fact prevailing when Miltiades approached the polemarch, Kallimachos, who had the eleventh vote.

Herodotos' account appropriates Miltiades' rhetoric – in quite a lengthy direct speech (6.109.3–6) – to set out starkly the alternatives open to Athens: it is in Kallimachos' power, Miltiades argues, either to enslave Athens or to make her free. The danger that hangs over Athens now is greater than ever before. If she fights, there is the prospect of becoming the first city of Greece; if not,²⁷ he says, 'I expect that some great *stasis* will fall upon and confound the thoughts of the Athenians, with the result that they medize...' (ἔλπομαι τίνα στάσιν μεγάλην διασεισέν ἐμπεσοῦσαν τὰ Ἀθηναίων φρονήματα ὥστε μηδίσαι, 6.109.5). With ἔλπομαι he thus raises the spectre of a future that is not merely possible, but highly likely.²⁸ But if battle is joined, 'before some rot can show itself in any of the Athenians' (πρὶν τι καὶ σαθρὸν Ἀθηναίων μετεξέτεροισι ἐγγενέσθαι: a powerful image of moral as well as physical corruption),²⁹ they are capable (provided the gods are impartial) of prevailing (6.109.5). Finally he reiterates that all this depends on Kallimachos' choice. With this argument Miltiades won Kallimachos over, and with his polemarch's vote secured, Athens (unlike Eretria) resolved to fight.

Throughout this narrative Herodotos emphasizes the contingency of Marathon's very occurrence, with everything depending on the decision

of a single individual. With the vote initially tied, but the ‘surrender’ argument gaining ground, only Miltiades’ intervention diverts the Athenians from the road of immediate surrender, and its ramifications. As Herodotos explicitly notes, the origins of the ultimate resolution to fight go back to an earlier decision of the Athenian *dēmos* (in choosing Miltiades as general, 6.104.2), which placed him in a position to persuade Kallimachos. The contingency of the outcome is further highlighted by the digression Herodotos includes about Miltiades’ two earlier brushes with the death penalty, where he narrowly escaped charges brought by both foreign and Athenian enemies (6.104). Thus the man who played the decisive role in his persuasion of Kallimachos might not have been alive to do so.³⁰ In several ways indeed Herodotos’ presentation of the Marathon narrative reminds readers of the quarrels within Greek *poleis* and between them³¹ that risk turning this story into a narrative of Greek defeat, with Greeks preferring to medize than band together. Herodotos’ reference to the accusation that the Alkmaionids held up a shield to signal to the Persians to sail around the coast and to take Athens – a charge that remains unresolved – adds to the sense of uncertainties, of possible medism from within. (After all, ‘a shield was held up’ by someone in Athens, Herodotos insists, whether or not it was the Alkmaionids.)

The alternative narrative of Athenian surrender is promoted further by the framing narrative – the account of the Persian attempt against Eretria and its conclusion – which from another direction raises the spectre of what could well have happened in the case of Athens, and details the consequences that would have stemmed from such a turn of events.

There Herodotos recounts how the Eretrians petitioned the Athenians for assistance, and the Athenians agreed to help out. But, rather than simply narrating events as they unfolded from this point, Herodotos instead exposes the Eretrians’ internal deliberations, revealing just the sort of unhealthy thinking that risks engendering medism, the type of which Miltiades speaks (cp. p. 31 above):

The plan of the Eretrians, as it turned out, was not at all sound (οὐδὲν ὑγιές): they sent for the Athenians, but they had in mind notions of two kinds (ἐφρόνεον δὲ διφασίας ιδέας). For one group of them planned to abandon the city for the heights of Euboia, while the rest were contriving treason, expecting to receive private profits from the Persian (6.100.1–2).

The scope of available choices is expressive and creates an implied narrative of possible future outcomes: possible outcomes that do not even include the idea of armed resistance. And indeed, in the ensuing narrative, the Eretrians, Herodotos observes, ‘had no design of coming out and fighting’, but ‘focused all their attention on guarding the walls, since the

opinion had prevailed not to abandon the city' (6.101.2); and after a week of defending the walls against attack, the city is betrayed by two Eretrians of repute: which is an outcome that the earlier sketch of the Euboians' designs has made to seem inevitable, as has the wider pattern of private profits motivating individual Greeks. The defence of the city was not an option in those earlier deliberations. (This outcome also fits into what becomes a broader motif in the *Histories* of the futility of the defence of walls³² – which gradually builds up a broader untold narrative of the failure that would have resulted from Greek reliance on the defence of literal walls – whether Athens' Akropolis wall or the Peloponnesian Isthmos wall.) The Athenians and Eretrians are linked by similar imagery of bodily corruption: but whereas the Eretrians' thinking is 'not healthy' (οὐδὲν ὑγιές), the Athenians do in the event avoid 'rotteness' (τι σαθρόν).³³

When Herodotos returns to the Eretrian narrative at the close of the Marathon account, to describe the spectacle of the Eretrians brought to Darius, the slavery of Athenians to Persia that might well have been is brought vividly before readers' eyes. 'There', Herodotos writes, – at Ardericca, 210 stades from Susa – 'Darius planted the Eretrians, who continued to dwell in that place up until my time (οἱ καὶ μέχρι ἐμέο εἶχον τὴν χώραν ταύτην), keeping their ancient language' (6.119.4). The permanence of their condition is brought out in Herodotos' change of temporal perspective with the 'prospective' imperfect.³⁴ Supplying a model that shapes readerly expectations about the enclosed Marathon narrative, the Eretrian narrative thus further advances the 'untold narrative' we have traced of Athenian failure and enslavement. Eretria's fate is Athens' untold fate made manifest. And the upshot of all this – these narrative strands that promote the sense that the Athenians might well have gone down a different road, one that would terminate in their slavery to Persia – would have been the removal of the possibility of their playing any role at all in the ensuing Wars.

The various narrative strands that thread through and around Herodotos' account of the battle of Marathon do indeed take up more space than the account of the battle itself: but Plutarch in his criticism in hindsight, from a vantage point much further removed from events than Herodotos', missed what Herodotos was trying to bring out,³⁵ namely the significance of the Athenians' choice. It was a close shave, but ultimately the Athenians avoided 'the worst' (ἡ χείρων, 6.109.2) of the alternatives before them. For the Eretrians, by contrast, the option of fighting was never even on the table. That the Athenians had to make this decision – that the result of the choice was not inevitable – reveals that they were not fearless cardboard cut-out heroes, free from any impulse to capitulate and medize. Here, the

Athenians and their achievement are best understood, as Empson wrote, by bearing both possibilities in mind. Doing so brings out the challenge of the situation and far from detracting from it, makes the ultimate achievement *more* glorious: for the choice is more significant than the event that issues from it.³⁶ Whereas the latter may be a matter largely of practical factors such as numbers of fighters and armour,³⁷ the decision that precedes is revelatory of character and *moral* strength. In the event the Persians are astounded at the apparent madness of their enemy, who are charging them at a run despite their small numbers (6.112.2). Herodotos observes that the Athenians fought ‘worthily of *logos*’ (6.112.3), and were the first Greeks who charged their enemy at a run and endured without flinching the sight of the Persians clad in their distinctive clothing. Furthermore, the preceding debate allowed for exceptional Athenian individuals to step forward and use their Athenian flexibility and rhetorical skill to contrive that the better choice – the high road – was eventually taken. We might reflect that the Eretrians – like the Samians in book 3, and in contrast to the Athenians – ‘did not, it seems, want to be free’ (3.143.2). It appears that in Herodotos’ view, genuine desire for freedom makes one try harder than that.

3. Artemision and Salamis

Herodotos’ presentation strategy in recounting the events of Artemision and Salamis similarly evokes alternative narratives of the Greeks’ fearful abandonment of their land and medizing, and again impresses upon readers how very differently events might have unfolded. Herodotos opens this stretch of narrative with the famous explicit counterfactual (discussed above, p. 28), and his retrospective judgment about the Athenians’ significance. Its placement here, before the narrative turns to recounting the lead up to and battles of Artemision and Salamis, is especially apt and effective, for it is this stretch of history that would demonstrate the crucial importance of Athens’ fleet.

Already in the flashback that follows on the heels of 7.139, back to the time of the oracle given to the Athenians, Herodotos begins developing the alternative, implied narratives that his explicit counterfactual so quickly suppressed. He quotes verbatim the chilling first oracle the Athenians receive from Delphi – an authoritative source – that describes the Athenians fleeing to the ends of the earth, with neither head nor body, hands nor feet (of the Athenian body politic) remaining firm (7.140.2–3). When the Athenian ambassadors are ‘giving themselves up under the prophesied evil’, a single individual, the Delphian Timon, intervenes, advising them to propitiate Delphi again; and the Pythia returns her famous

second oracle, with its advice that the ‘wooden wall’ at least will stand (7.141). In the interpretation of this oracle back at Athens, the professional seers endorse abandoning the Attic land to settle in another, unwilling for the Athenians to prepare for a sea battle or oppose the Persians at all (7.143.3). At this key moment Themistokles intervenes, offering an interpretation that the Athenians deem preferable – αἰρετώτερα, ‘more to be chosen’ – than that of the professionals (7.143.3). So again everything comes to depend upon a single individual, whose persuasion of the *dēmos* diverts the course of events from what appears to be the default path of abandoning the land.³⁸ This unrealized possibility remains in play in Themistokles’ threat to the Greek admirals at Salamis to go to Siris (8.62), and we find a sort of topsy-turvy variant of it in the Athenians’ actual abandonment of the physical city, but so as to save it on their ships, which is a striking inversion, as Christopher Pelling has observed, of the trope of Athenian autochthony.³⁹

Herodotos next delves back in time to explain how Athens came to have in her possession the ships that opened up in the first place the possibility of naval defence. This is another narrative of a decision averted: the Athenians had resolved on dividing up between themselves, at ten drachma per head, the revenue from a recent silver strike in the Laureion mines, but Themistokles ‘persuaded them to cease from this division’ (ἀνέγνωσε Ἀθηναίους τῆς διαρέσιος ταύτης πανσαμένους..., 7.144.1), and have two hundred ships built instead with a view (at least in the first instance) to the war with Aigina. Herodotos remarks that ‘this war breaking out saved Greece at that time by compelling the Athenians to become sailors’ (7.144.2). Themistokles, as Herodotos presents it, thus deflected the Athenians from the path of private profit, for a path that ends up securing the public good.⁴⁰ Here we can see even more clearly than at Marathon how in such knife-edge situations the Athenian *dēmos* proves capable of reconsidering a situation and – allowing itself to be persuaded – of making a more admirable choice, one less strongly determined by immediate self-interest. These narratives underscore how fragile a commodity is salvation – how fragile was the salvation of the Athenians and their fleet, on which depended (in Herodotos’ view) that of Greece as a whole. The subsequent analepsis recounting the Athenians’ decision in the lead-up to Xerxes’ invasion makes a similar point: at that crucial moment, when inter-Greek *stasis* threatened Greece’s survival, the Athenians displayed their ability to grasp realities and change their minds in rescinding – but only provisionally – their claim to leadership of Greece (8.3, quoted in part at n. 23).

In the case of the Greeks more generally (of the subset who around the time of Salamis still remain on the Greek side), the threatened possibilities

of ‘scattering each to one’s own city’, medizing for private gain, and so forth, are so fully developed, with inclusion of causes, events, and consequences, that they too go beyond being simply ‘motifs’, to being better understood as alternative narratives that expound a virtual history. The Greeks at Artemision are terrified at the unexpectedly strong condition of the Persian fleet even after the recent storm, and are contemplating fleeing homewards into Greece (δρησµὸν ἐβουλευόντο...ἔσω ἐς τὴν Ἑλλάδα, 8.4.1, etc.). Herodotos lays quite remarkable emphasis on this future possibility, which to some extent overshadows the account of the fighting that in fact eventuates. Plutarch again objected, irritated that Herodotos should depict the Greeks contemplating flight even before the news of the Thermopylai defeat (whereas after the defeat such a movement could be construed as sensible withdrawal), and deeming the repetition of the key term δρησμός quite malicious.⁴¹ Herodotos’ sketch of the Persians wary lest the Greeks escape by night further develops this potential for flight.

And the Greeks’ escape, according to Herodotos, was only narrowly averted by appeals on all sides to self-interest: with the Euboians desiring that the Greeks stay long enough to enable them to convey their own citizens to safety, and Themistokles contriving this outcome in response to the appeal of bribes. Finally the idea of *kerdos*, profit, shifts into the specific form of medism for personal gain, in Themistokles’ persuasion of the Corinthian admiral: ‘You at least will not desert us,’ he says; ‘for I will give you greater gifts than the King of the Medes would send you for abandoning the allies’ (8.4.2). Thus only by skilful appeals to self-interest does Themistokles successfully trump the impulse to abandon position and save one’s own skin. Not that that impulse was not understandable: when the sea battle finally occurs, the Persians deem the Greeks mad (8.10.1) to engage them with so few ships (just as earlier they deemed them mad to fight at Marathon: 6.112.2), and expect to win an easy victory: which, Herodotos remarks, was ‘an altogether reasonable expectation’ (οἰκότα κάρτα ἐλπίσαντες, 8.10.1). In the event, the battle is indecisive.

Shortly thereafter the Greeks receive the news of the Thermopylai defeat – at which point they sail away from Artemision, and, at the Athenians’ entreaty, put in at Salamis. Here begins the most famous alternative narrative of the entire *Histories*: that of the Greeks’ dispersal and failure to fight at Salamis, a virtual outcome that Themistokles thwarts only against all possible odds.

The account of Salamis opens with news of the capture of the Athenian acropolis. The Greeks are so panic-struck that some captains leap aboard ship and hoist sails for flight, leaving right in the middle of a debate. By those who remain it is resolved (ἐκυρώθη) that they should leave and sail

south, to fight for the Isthmos. With the *stratēgoi* returned to their ships, and this decision already made, Mnesiphilos, ‘an Athenian’, approaches Themistokles, and sets out what the consequences will be of their planned action: ‘If you put out to sea from Salamis,’ he observes,

‘you will have no country to fight for: for everyone will turn to their own *poleis*, and neither Eurybiadas nor anyone else will be able to check them, with the result that the armament will be scattered; and Greece will perish through lack of wisdom’ (8.57.2).

The shape of this future narrative is later echoed and reinforced by Artemisia’s advice to Xerxes (8.68).⁴² Mnesiphilos suggests that Themistokles do all he can to dissolve this plan (διαχέαι τὰ βεβουλευμένα), to persuade Eurybiadas to change his mind (ἀναγνώσαι Εὐρυβιάδην μεταβουλεύσασθαι) and so remain at Salamis. Herodotos again excludes hindsight by detailing a different and seemingly certain future: one that has already begun to be determined by choices that have already been taken (and require *undoing* by Mnesiphilos *et al.*).

Themistokles next persuades Eurybiadas to reassemble the admirals. Addressing the Spartan commander in front of this audience (8.59–60) he diplomatically avoids emphasizing the anticipated flight, but lays out the strategic advantages of Salamis. The motif of the salvation of Greece being dependent upon a single individual again surfaces: ‘it’s in your power to save Greece’ (Ἐν σοὶ νῦν ἔστι σῶσαι τὴν Ἑλλάδα), he tells Eurybiadas, ‘if you are persuaded by me, and fight the battle here’ (8.60a).⁴³ Finally, taunted by Adeimantos, he threatens that if the Greeks sail away, the Athenians will uproot their households wholesale and move to Siris in Italy, leaving the Greeks deprived of such allies.⁴⁴ This prompts Eurybiadas to change his mind (ἀνεδιδάσκετο Εὐρυβιάδης, 8.63) – out of fear, Herodotos surmises, that the Athenians should desert, if they sailed to the Isthmos; for ‘without the Athenians (ἀπολιπόντων γὰρ Ἀθηναίων), the rest would have been no match for the enemy’. Thus Herodotos rounds off his account: ‘He chose this plan (ταύτην δὲ αἰρέεται τὴν γνώμην), to remain and fight a sea battle where they were’ (8.63). Such a decision would probably have been in the hands of the commanders generally, as Angus Bowie observes (2007 ad loc.), but Herodotos’ presentation highlights again the importance of a single individual. Events might otherwise have unfolded quite differently.

The Peloponnesians’ on-going fears for the Peloponnese, and desire to be fighting closer to it, continue to surface, until finally another council is held. The Peloponnesians argue for sailing away south to fight for the Peloponnese, while the Athenians, Aeginetans and Megarians argue for remaining where they are, and thus defending the Peloponnese but also regions further north including their own. At this point Themistokles,

‘when he was being outvoted by the Peloponnesians’ (ὥς ἐσσοῦτο τῇ γνώμῃ ὑπὸ τῶν Πελοποννησίων, 8.75.1), sneaks out of the assembly and sends his slave Sikinnos with his message to Xerxes that the Greeks are fearful and planning flight (δρησὸν βουλευόνται καταρρωδηκότες, 8.75.2), without any union in their counsels – which again reinforces the alternative narrative of Greek failure to unite and scattering. And so Themistokles entices the Persians to attack, and the battle of Salamis takes place. As Themistokles explains to Aristides: ‘it was necessary, when the Greeks were not willing to join battle, to make them stand unwilling’ (ἔδεε γάρ, ὅτε οὐκ ἐκόντες ἤθελον ἐς μάχην κατίσταςθαι οἱ Ἕλληνες, ἀέκοντας παραστήσασθαι, 8.80.1). The idea of fleeing to protect the Peloponnese thus comes to be equated with simply being ‘unwilling to join battle’ *tout court*: sailing away to fight another day in another place is the equivalent, under these circumstances, of abandoning Greece. The motif of ‘sailing away’ is really far more than just a ‘motif’, for it brings in its train such clearly articulated consequences.⁴⁵

4. Conclusion: remembering Athens

The same pattern of individuals’ interventions that only just prevent a default road being taken continues through the rest of the *Histories*. Such emphasis on the determining role of individuals, and frequently on their personal motivations, is not so much an indication that Herodotos was unaware of impersonal motive forces. It is partly to be explained by the desire to produce a dramatic account, to underscore the contingency of historical outcomes, and to memorialize the key difference made by important individuals. But it is also a way of bringing out still further truths – having a *backward explanatory* force⁴⁶ that clarifies why the future turned out in this and not in any other way – for an individual’s behaviour may shed light on the character of the community that produced him. It was Athens that produced Miltiades, Mnesiphilos, and Themistokles, not to mention Aristides (another individual whose key role in the events of Salamis Herodotos underlines: 8.79–81) – and in their absence she perhaps could have produced other such individuals, in which case Herodotos’ virtual speculation may be less closely tied to Great Man history than it first seems, and more attuned to cultural and political contexts. No such individuals emerged from the community of Eretrians to shift the likely outcome from its default path; and similarly in Sparta, few such dynamic, independent-thinking individuals appear (though of course we do find individuals like Leonidas and Amompharetos, who well embody the Spartan sense of military steadfastness). The Spartans go on to fight a magnificent fight (cp. 9.71.1–2) at Plataia only after receiving advice from a Tegean, Chileus, that if the Athenians joined the Persians, the Isthmos wall would be of no use

to the Peloponnesians. As Plutarch complained: 'So that is what drew Pausanias to Plataia with his army; if that Chileus fellow had been kept in Tegea by some personal business, Greece would not have survived!' (871f–872a).

But, of course, Greece did survive, and it did so, as Herodotos still tells us now, ages and ages thence, in large part because of Athens. The alternative narratives of defeat in the *Histories* – the roads of flight and surrender that are ultimately not taken – combine with narratives of realized failure (Greeks who surrendered and medized – or were defeated, as in the Ionian revolt) to heighten the sense that the final outcome of the Persian Wars might well have been otherwise: that there was nothing inevitable about Greek victory; nothing indeed about *Persian* character and *nomoi* that necessitated defeat. By underlining the contingency of what actually happened, the alternative narratives place the history of the Persian Wars in a distinctly non-triumphalist perspective. It is a perspective that works against the grain of the *Histories'* strand of divine or cosmic determination (which on the whole appears to foreshadow Greek victory). It points rather to some optimism on Herodotos' part about the human capacity to change history.

At the same time, it was something about the Athenians in particular that enabled them to reverse course, to rethink and reopen debate,⁴⁷ turning aside from the road that stretched out in front of them: and this presents a clear contrast, for instance, with the Persians in the Constitutions debate, who when confronted with a choice resolved to continue along the road of monarchy (3.80–82), and with Xerxes himself, who, despite the deliberations that Herodotos recounts at such length (7.5–18), ultimately continues on along Darius' road of invasion of Greece.⁴⁸

The evocation of alternative possible futures allowed Herodotos to set forth a nuanced picture of the Athenians' character and role in the Persian Wars. The particular emphasis on Athens is probably best understood against the backdrop of the contemporary climate of censure of Athens. To judge from Thucydides' Athenians' reference to their defensive rehearsing of their role in the Persian Wars and their desire not to be deprived of renown for their achievements at that time (1.73.2),⁴⁹ and from the polemical quality of Herodotos' observations at 7.139, retrospective on the Persian Wars was a controversial topic in the latter part of the century, with judgments being made that negatively revised the role of the Athenians in the Persian Wars.⁵⁰ Here, as elsewhere in the *Histories*, Herodotos would seem to be countering prevailing views in the interests of historical truth, with the implication in this case that (even as the good historian must employ hindsight) a narrowly retrospective judgment

may miss the mark. Thus at the moment of his clearest reference to contemporary censure of Athens, Herodotos emphasizes that he, by contrast, will not allow criticism in hindsight – criticism monopolized by awareness of the oppressive power that Athens would become – to taint his judgment, but rather will cleave closely to the truth: ‘At this point I am constrained by necessity to set forth an opinion that will be displeasing (ἐπιφθονον) for the majority of men, but nonetheless, since it seems to be true, I will not suppress it’ (7.139.1). Thus his famous judgment about the Athenians as saviours of Greece invites readers to appreciate the help Athens gave Greece then, in implicit opposition to interpretations current in his day that focused only on the imperialism that came later. At the same time, Herodotos’ Athenians are not cardboard cut-out heroes any more than his Spartans are at Thermopylai (cp. Baragwanath 2008, 64–78), and the measured aspect of Herodotos’ portrait of the Athenians may be appreciated against the foil of the more romanticized views of the Athenians’ role in the Persian Wars found in the fourth-century Athenian orators (Marincola 2007, cp. n. 26 above). And Herodotos occasionally chooses to accentuate the perspective from hindsight, as at 8.3 (above, pp. 25, 35), where he invited readers to reflect on subsequent history and exposed the self-interested nature of the Athenians’ aspirations.

While Herodotos openly anoints the Athenians saviours of Greece, it is the *Histories’* alternative, unrealized narratives that deepen our understanding of the true significance of this proclamation. Herodotos’ virtual history prompts us to consider what was distinctive about the Athenians, why they took the road not travelled by so many other Greek cities, and why thanks to their dynamism and intelligent leadership⁵¹ they not Sparta were most responsible for the salvation of Greece. Where Sparta dallied, and other cities prized short-term considerations and fell to self-interest and private gain, Athens took initiative and weathered these forces, valuing flexibility and independence of thought, intelligence, and debate, and the individuals that embodied those values. And when it came to the survival of Greece that was something which, according to Herodotos, made all the difference.

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Notes

¹ For Archaic and Classical Greece, see esp. Thomas 1989.

² As Fornara well put it in 1971: ‘Certainly there can be no doubt that the political conditions of his own time were decisive in making Herodotos treat the Persian War in the manner that he has. He wrote a detailed and psychologically rich study centring on the two states, Sparta and Athens, which then were allies but now at each other’s throat. He was not writing in isolation about “ancient history” or unwinding a thread that was severed in 479 BC. He was writing a book at a time when these two states were locked in combat and he was directing it to an audience...which would of a certainty have extrapolated conclusions of immediate moment, as Herodotos well knew, from his account’ (44–5).

³ Dewald 1997, 82.

⁴ This is the first event Thucydides mentions in his account of how the Athenians ‘came into the position that led to their expansion’ (1.89.1).

⁵ Herodotos refers to events down to 431 and 430 BC: 7.233, 9.73, 7.137, cp. Stadter 2012a, 42 n. 14 with text.

⁶ For Herodotos, as Marincola 1997, 133 observes, ‘the only experience implied in the narrative is that of enquiry’ (*pace* Moles 2007, 266 n. 100 with text, who suggests that analogies between Herodotos and Sokles remind readers of Herodotos’ own experience of tyranny). See Vannicelli 1993, *passim* but esp. 15–16 on the ‘campo storico erodoteo’ (‘Herodotean historical field’), which extends from 570–60 – 479/8 BC.

⁷ 7.137.3, 9.73.3, cp. 7.233. Cp. Munson 2001 on Herodotos’ generalizing interpretation of the earthquake on Delos: ‘Herodotos does not contradict the public perception that the prodigy predicted the Peloponnesian War, but he rather uses it to broaden the significance that it would be more natural to attribute to (it)... He interprets it, in other words, as a sign not merely of the misfortunes of the Persian Wars but also of the subsequent turmoil from the wars of Greeks against Greeks down to the moment of narration’ (201–2) (and, I would add, into the future).

⁸ See also 9.106.4 and 9.114.2, with Munson 2007, 155 n. 42 with text. The expressive analepsis at 8.3 is discussed at Baragwanath 2008, 199–201.

⁹ For Herodotos’ allusions to the Athenian Empire see *inter alia* Strasburger 1955, Fornara 1971, Stadter 1992, Moles 1996, 2002, Fowler 2003, Blösel 2004, Forsdyke 2006. Irwin 2007, 47 n. 16, Munson 2007, n. 44, and Pelling 2007, 182 highlight various aspects of the expressive wordplay in the *Histories* that surrounds ἀρχή.

¹⁰ For Herodotos on the significance of walls: Baragwanath 2008, 144–7.

¹¹ Moreover, as Stadter 1992: 809 importantly observes, ‘At the same time there are many indications that Herodotos expected his audience to see other analogies as well, for example, that between the Persians and the Spartans’; Stadter 2012 shows that the *Histories* exposes Spartan imperialist ambitions as much as Athenian. For a different emphasis from mine, see e.g. Blösel 2004, who regards Herodotos as using the trajectory of Themistokles to mirror that of imperial Athens; Moles 1996 on the *Histories* as a specific ‘warning’ to the Athenians, 2007 on Sokles as Herodotos’ spokesman.

¹² There is debate as to whether this phrase indicates purely narrative necessity (so Gould 1989, 73–8), or (divine) predetermination (so, e.g., Harrison 2000, 223–42).

¹³ The revelation of contingency is Pelling’s ‘first virtue’ of virtual history: this volume, p. 2. On contingencies and counterfactual history in Herodotos, see esp. Irwin and Greenwood 2007b, 36–9.

¹⁴ Cp. how Herodotos encourages readers – with Kroisos – to forget the oracle to the Lydians: Pelling 2006, 161–4, emphasizing the productive nature of this process: ‘the questions the audience have come to ask, and the explanations they have themselves essayed, remain questions and explanations for their future reading and hearing. Apollo’s answers do not end the procedure; but they do remind the audience that historical explanation is a very provisional, very elusive, and very challenging business’ (164).

¹⁵ See Gerrig 1993, 157–76 on ‘anomalous suspense’, the phenomenon in both fiction and non-fiction of readers experiencing suspense even when they know what will happen: how (as Gerrig p. 80 puts it) ‘Even if we know exactly what will take place (Jack will survive his trip up the beanstalk) and how (by chopping down the beanstalk, thus killing the giant), once we undertake a performance of the narrative world, this information somehow becomes inaccessible.’ Konstan 2008 has interesting remarks on how suspense may indeed be generated because of awareness of an outcome: that’s to say, awareness of impending narrative closure.

¹⁶ I choose this metaphor because it corresponds with an ancient Greek way of conceptualizing choices between different possible future courses of action. In Herodotos for example Kandaules’ wife offers Gyges the choice of taking whichever road he prefers of the two that lie before him (1.11.2: Νῦν τοι δυνὼν ὁδῶν παρεουσέων, Γύγη, δίδωμι αἶρεσιν, ὁκοτέρην βούλει τραπέσθαι); Gelon disregards one ὁδός and takes another (7.163.1: ταύτην μὲν τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμέλησε, ὃ δὲ ἄλλης εἶχετο) in resolving not to lend aid to the Greek cause. Cp. expressions with just the verb τρέπω – to turn, in one direction or another, whether physically (down a path) or metaphorically: as of Xerxes’ change of mind (7.15.2: τετραμμένῳ), cp. the Ionian tyrants won over by Histiaios’ opinion rather than Miltiades’ (4.137.3), the Athenians inclining towards supporting the Greek cause rather than abandoning it (7.139.5). Purves 2010, ch. 4 offers enlightening discussion of the importance of the metaphor of the narrative road or path in Herodotos’ *Histories*, with further references to discussion of the literary motif of the road at 122 n. 11. See also Lang 1984: ch. 1 on Herodotos’ own narrative direction.

¹⁷ See e.g. Darbo-Peschanski 1985, Dewald 1999, 221–52, Boedeker 2000, 14, 2003, 31.

¹⁸ ‘None could say accurately the number of cooking women and *pallakai* and eunuchs’, etc. (7.187), cp. the vast number of craft destroyed by the storm off Magnesia (7.191.1: οὐκ ἐπὶν ἄριθμός).

¹⁹ Cp. e.g. 5.95.1: ‘many other sorts of things (παντοῖα καὶ ἄλλα) occurred’ in the battle between Mytileneans and Athenians, ‘among them also (ἐν δὲ δὴ καὶ)’ that Alkaios the poet took flight and escaped...’: παντοῖα καὶ ἄλλα prompts readers to envisage, beyond the particular incident involving Alkaios, a spectacle of all sorts of things that might occur in such a battle.

²⁰ Herodotos’ inquiries will cover **τά τε ἄλλα καὶ δι’ ἣν αἰτίην ἐπολέμησαν ἀλλήλοισι** (‘both other things and for what cause they made war on one another’).

²¹ E.g. at *Il.* 5.311–12. See H.-G. Nesselrath 1992 (‘nearly’ episodes), Reinhardt 1961, 107 ff. (the ‘epic almost’), De Jong 1987, 68–81 (‘if not-situations’) with Pelling pp. 3–4 in this volume, who observes that the phenomenon in epic does not usually invite much further reflection on trains of consequences and the possibility that events might ‘really’ have turned out differently. See also n. 36 below. For modern discussion

of ways in which explicit counterfactual history may supplement historical analysis see *inter alia* Ferguson 1999; on its role in ancient historiography, see e.g. Demand 1987 and Irwin and Greenwood 2007b, 38–9 (Herodotos), Flory 1988 and Will 2000 (Thucydides), Morello 2002 (Livy), O’Gorman 2006 (Tacitus).

²² On this counterfactual see Demand 1987 and (in this volume) Pelling, pp. 13–15 (with 7.139 quoted in full on p. 13). For a modern example of counterfactual argument regarding the significance of Salamis see Strauss 2006.

²³ Compare 8.3.1, where Herodotos observes that the Athenians before Xerxes’ invasion yielded to Sparta in the question of leadership ‘because they considered it very important that Greece should survive (μέγα τε ποιεύμενοι περιεῖναι τὴν Ἑλλάδα), and knew that if they disputed the leadership, Greece would perish. And they were right’.

²⁴ There are countless other implicit and explicit counterfactuals in the *Histories*, e.g. 6.30 (if Histaios had been taken alive to Darius he would have come to no harm), 6.130–131 (what if Kleisthenes had given Agariste’s hand in marriage to Hippokleides rather than Megakles, and so precluded the family line that would produce Perikles...), 8.141 (the oracle remembered by the Spartans that Persians and Athenians would together conquer the Peloponnese), instances of advice taken or not taken, etc.; see Demand 1987 for various categories of explicit counterfactual conditional in Herodotos. My focus is a limited selection of narratives that relate to the ‘master’ alternative narrative.

²⁵ Herodotos is likewise clear-eyed at 7.139.4 in raising the possibility (which Plutarch found highly objectionable: *de Malignitate Herodoti* 864b) that Sparta ultimately might have medized. It may be that public opinion in the second half of the fifth century inclined to view Sparta as having been further from medizing in the time of the Persian Wars than Athens was, and that desire to counter such a view led Herodotos to focus on the Athenians as saviours (on which see further below). Herodotos counters the Spartans’ (and others’) liberation propaganda: see Baragwanath 2008, 89–90, 94–5, Stadter 2012, 3–8.

²⁶ The Athenians’ role in the Persian Wars was being embellished in Athenian oratory right from the time of the Persian Wars (note e.g. the Athenians’ speech before Plataia, which misrepresents Marathon as having been fought by Athenians alone: Hdt. 9.37.5). Marincola 2007 discusses the phenomenon in extant fourth-century Athenian oratory, cp. below, pp. 39–40.

²⁷ Here Miltiades’ words echo Herodotos’ own of earlier: δῖχα γίνονται αἱ γνώμαι... (6.109.1).

²⁸ ἔλλομαι with reference to the future, in its other appearance in the *Histories* (7.218.2, of the Persians’ expectation that no one will appear to oppose them on the mountain path leading to Thermopylai), denotes a firm expectation about a particular short-term future outcome.

²⁹ See Brock 2004: 169 for σαθρόν as evoking the rotting timbers of the ship of state or, more likely, corruption within the body politic, cp. Scott 2005, *ad* 6.109.5 (σαθρόν for the bodily corruption of a sick patient).

³⁰ The presentation of these twin sources of opposition – from within and from outside the Greek world – feeds into a broader pattern, which here and elsewhere in the *Histories* serves as a reminder that threats emanated not only from Persia but also from within Greece. See especially 6.98.2.

³¹ Note e.g. the analepsis Herodotos includes (6.108) about how the Plataians came

to be present as allies of Athens at Marathon: Herodotos details their approach to Athens only after first being rebuffed by Sparta, and attributes to the Spartans an ascription of motivation (the desire to embroil Athens in a quarrel with the Thebans) that contrasts with their professed practical explanation (geographical distance).

³² Cp. Bowie 2006, Stadter 2012b, 9.

³³ Brock 2004: 169 compares these instances and provides other examples of Herodotos 'identif(ying) bodily health with loyalty to the Greek cause'. See also n. 29 above.

³⁴ Cp. Naiden 1999.

³⁵ It is a frequent finding of this volume that hindsight gets worse as one moves further in time from events. See Index s.v. 'hindsight'.

³⁶ Compare Pelliccia 1987, 60 on the effect of unattainable wishes in Pindar, Homer, etc.: 'the digression into fantasy serves to emphasize the speaker's ultimate decision to address the real circumstances that oppress him. This is not to say that the wish, as "foil," is "dismissed," with the implied suggestion that it is therefore aimless rhetoric or dispensable padding. The speaker's character is rounded out: we inevitably feel more sympathy with the practical man if we know him to endure the temptation to behave otherwise; likewise, we are all the more impressed to see a man known to have experienced the joys of pleasant fantasy pull himself away to higher obligations.' Pelling's observation at n. 21 still applies; historiography engages with more 'real' alternatives.

³⁷ Cp. e.g. Herodotos' remark on the substandard armour of Mardonios' army at Plataia (9.62.3).

³⁸ A charismatic individual is in the right place at the opportune moment, to *only just* prompt a different road to be taken; and Herodotos highlights the other paths that were open at the time: the option of abandoning the Attic land and settling elsewhere.

³⁹ Pelling 2009 and this volume, p. 16.

⁴⁰ Cp. the path of ἱδία κέρδεα the Eretrians deliberated over at 6.100.2 (above, p. 32). It may well be, as Kathryn Milne points out to me, that at stake in this choice was actually Athens' development as a land or sea power (not personal gain versus a common public interest), with the private allocation intended to enable citizens to purchase hoplite armour. Herodotos obscures those alternatives by mentioning Themistokles' plan to build ships, but omitting the purpose of the private allocation.

⁴¹ 'Earlier he spoke of "fleeing" (δρασμὸν), he says "fleeing" now, and soon he will talk of "fleeing" again – so bitterly he clings to the word' (*de Malignitate Herodoti* 867e).

⁴² Plutarch chides: 'Herodotos should have used verses for that, to present Artemisia as a Sibyl foretelling the future so accurately!' (*de Malignitate Herodoti* 870a).

⁴³ Cp. 8.62.1: Σὺ εἰ μὲν εἶς αὐτοῦ καὶ μένων ἔσσαι ἀνὴρ ἀγαθός· εἰ δὲ μή, ἀνατρέψεις τὴν Ἑλλάδα ('You – if you remain here – by remaining you will be a good man; if not, you will overthrow Greece').

⁴⁴ συμμάχων τοιῶνδε μουνωθέντες: this speaker's threat with regard to the future, with μουνωθέντες, thus resonates with Herodotos' explicit counterfactual regarding the Spartans at 7.139.3.

⁴⁵ See also Pelling in this volume, pp. 15–16, for the theme in Herodotos of running (or sailing) away.

⁴⁶ I borrow the expression of Pelling p. 5 in this volume.

⁴⁷ As (narrowly) in Thucydides, too, reopening the Mytilenean debate (whereas the Spartans in the Plataian debate which is juxtaposed with the Mytilenean do not change course). Nikias likewise reopens the debate on the Sicilian expedition, though ineffectively.

⁴⁸ He does not e.g. succeed in working against the press of the divine at 7.12–18, as the Athenians managed to elicit a better Delphic oracle after the grim first one (above, p. 34).

⁴⁹ ‘As for *ta Mēdika*..., even if it will be rather tedious for us (or possibly ‘you’) to be always referring to it, we are forced to speak. For when we took our actions, the risk was for the common good, of which you had a share of the results; let us not be deprived of the entire reputation, if it helps us’ (1.73.2).

⁵⁰ Debate about responsibility for the decisive contribution to the victory in the Persian Wars is evident already in Herodotos (note e.g. Damaratos’ observations on the Spartans as the best fighters among Greeks: 7.102–4) and appears to become even more heated in the fourth century: see Marincola 2007.

⁵¹ Cp. Thucydides’ Athenians’ judgment at 1.74 that the Athenians provided three items most conducive to success in the Persian Wars: the most ships; the most intelligent commander, Themistokles; and the most daring zeal.

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ATHENS' SICILIAN EXPEDITION: CONTEMPORARY SCENARIOS OF ITS OUTCOME

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Hitherto, counterfactual history has been almost exclusively a game for modern historians, and with something of a stress on 'modern': Ferguson's influential study barely glances at antiquity or ancient historians, and as a rule, the density of individual case studies increases with increasing proximity to the present.¹ That is strange, since although Ferguson seeks to present it as very largely a recent development in historiographic method (or respectable method, anyway), counterfactual thinking has been a part of the practice of Western historiography from its inception, as Emily Baragwanath shows in her study of Herodotus (this volume, pp. 26–30),² and his lead was followed in this, as in so much else, by Thucydides, so often hailed as the father of scientific history.³ Hence the main structuring sources around which much of the narrative of standard histories of Greece has been written are already imbued with a sense that things could have been different, and indeed almost that they ought to have been:⁴ the famous chapter (7.139) in which Herodotus sketches out an alternative outcome to Xerxes' invasion – itself incorporating alternative scenarios – brings into sharp relief what is implicit throughout books 7–9, that the Greek victory was very much against the odds.⁵ Of course, it is not surprising that a historian should reflect counterfactually on just such key moments, both to ponder on why events did not develop in the way that one would have expected (and which was therefore what was generally expected at the time) and to muse on what would have followed that unfulfilled scenario in order to bring out the significance of that key moment, to explain why it mattered.

The expedition launched by the Athenians against Sicily in 415 is another key moment, though a considerably more complex one, precisely because of the way in which it is presented by our main source, Thucydides. On the one hand, the whole narrative is shadowed by the reader's consciousness of its failure and the significance of that failure: a decade and a half before its proper place in the narrative, the expedition is already flagged up in

2.65.11 as *the* key error of the post-Periclean democracy. That is bound to colour the reader's perception, which must also be more obliquely influenced when we finally come to the events themselves by the direct juxtaposition with the Melian Dialogue,⁶ with its implication of unrestrained imperialistic grasping for more and an uneasy sense of moral transgression awaiting its requital. Nevertheless, in the narrative of events, Thucydides appears to work hard to avoid hindsight, highlighting the run of Athenian success early in the campaign and the oscillations of Syracusan confidence even when things begin to turn their way: there are plenty of specific indications, against the gloomy presentation of events as a whole, that militarily it was 'a damned nice thing' which the Athenians came close to winning, above all just across the transition between books, with the 'so close to danger' closure at the end of 7.2 echoing the escape of Mytilene in 427 (3.49.4).⁷ Even here, however, there are further complexities: not only does Thucydides shape the narrative and the reader's response by subtle manipulations of the flow of information,⁸ but his presentation of Syracuse as a second Athens or an anti-Athens adds a further level of patterning with its own nuances.⁹ The whole account of the expedition exemplifies the tension between the historian's wish to make clear his interpretation of events and his concern not to relate them in such a way as to make them appear preordained and dully inevitable, not to mention his desire as a literary artist to shape them satisfyingly for the reader. I am not going to revisit these aspects of the work, which have received much illuminating treatment in recent scholarship, nor the perennial problem of how to resolve the reasons for failure given in 2.65 with those highlighted in the narrative in Books 6 and 7;¹⁰ nor am I going to consider whether the Athenians could or should have won in reality. What I want to do here is to make use of counterfactual elements in Thucydides' narrative to address the issue of Athenian objectives and intentions: what did they, their opponents, and Greek opinion more generally, think the Athenians were setting out to do, how far was that in fact the case, and what, therefore, would have happened if the Athenians had been victorious?

The headline story in Thucydides is pretty simple: from the very beginning of their involvement in the island's affairs, the Athenians were looking to control the whole of Sicily. The first expedition of 427 was sent out officially in support of their ally Leontinoi, but this was merely a πρόφαισις, and the real intention was to conduct a trial exercise (πρόπειρα) to investigate the feasibility of gaining control of Sicily (εἰ σφίσι δυνατὰ εἶη τὰ ἐν τῇ Σικελίᾳ πράγματα ὑποχείρια γενέσθαι: 3.86.4). This statement has sometimes been thought premature and anachronistic,¹¹ and certainly actual military activity in 427–4 looks somewhat desultory,¹² but the threat

of Athenian aggression is the central argument in the speech of Hermokrates at the Conference of Gela in 424, where he urges the delegates to consider whether they can still preserve Sicily from Athenian intrigues (εἰ ἐπιβουλευομένην τὴν πᾶσαν Σικελίαν... ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων δυνησόμεθα ἔτι διασῶσαι: 4.60.1) and anticipates that, given the opportunity, they will one day come with a larger force and attempt to 'subject everything here to themselves' (4.60.2). Again, this has been suspected as unduly informed by hindsight, an anticipation of the great expedition of 415,¹³ but we do have to acknowledge that when the generals returned following the conclusion of hostilities, the Athenians at home imposed heavy sanctions on them on the grounds that they had been bribed to leave when they could have conquered the island (4.65.3). Mention in Aristophanes' *Knights* (1303–4), a few months earlier, of a suggestion that Hyperbolos was looking for ships for an expedition against Carthage chimes with Thucydides' editorial comment here on Athenian ambitions (4.65.4),¹⁴ and implies that these ambitions were being stirred up by politicians and were not informed by any strategic experience: hence, perhaps, the historian's censure of general Athenian ignorance when the ambition to conquer Sicily returns definitively at 6.1.¹⁵ Once again, the plausible motive (εὐπρεπῶς) of assistance to kinsmen and allies is subordinate to the real aim of total conquest, here labelled with the revealing phrase τῇ ἀληθεστάτῃ προφάσει (6.6.1) which aligns this initiative with the fundamental power politics of the whole Peloponnesian War.¹⁶

All this is clear enough, but rather summary: no indication is given of how the expedition's objective is to be achieved – as Simon Hornblower wisely observes, 'the...question ought to be "what would have counted as success?"' (1991–2008, III.vi) – nor of what form it would have taken on the ground. That is only made clear much later, at a time when the Athenians have been thwarted and are on the defensive: Nikias' reminder to his troops 'you know what your intentions were when you came against them' (7.64.1), though capable of more innocent explanation, is read by most commentators as implying what is made explicit in the corresponding speech of Gylippos and the Syracusan generals, the enslavement of the Syracusans (7.68.2–3) or, more rhetorically, all Sicily (7.66.2).¹⁷ Diodorus (13.2.6) reports that this was already decided in a secret session of the Boule before the departure of the expedition, and extends the intention of enslavement to Selinous, adding that the other cities were to be made tributary: perhaps this is Timaios characteristically filling in a gap, or spelling out what he sees as implicit in Thucydides.¹⁸ At all events, Gylippos is made to remind the Syracusans of it in the debate on the fate of the Athenians (D.S. 13.30.3: another gap filled),¹⁹ where the implication that

the Athenians ought to suffer the same fate as they intended for the Syracusans chimes with Thucydides' editorial observation that 'they had come to enslave others and now they were going away frightened of being enslaved themselves' (7.75.7), though Gylippos also spells out with reference to Mytilene, Melos and Skione (D.S. 13.30.4–6) the principle that they be done by as they did, which Thucydides' readers are trusted to supply for themselves.²⁰ Here we can see, too, how righteous anger at the fate they might have suffered will have kept the unrealised alternative fresh in the minds of Athens' enemies to fuel their zeal for retaliation²¹ – and in the longer term as a cue for 'never again' speeches – while for those who had led the resistance, above all the Syracusans, it underpinned a claim on the gratitude of their fellow Sicilians.

For much contemporary opinion, then (not to mention later historiography), the Athenian objective in Sicily was total subjugation – and indeed, on some accounts this was only the first stage of their plans, as we shall see. Athens' track-record for imperialist aggression and the well-documented cases of ruthlessness towards the defeated make the story plausible, and the neatness of the reversal of fortune which aborted its realisation makes it all the more likely that this is just what the majority of Greeks believed they would have done. In practice, though, this is both oversimplified and problematic.

First, there is a good deal of dissonance between editorial Thucydides and narrative Thucydides. The narrative of the early stages of the expedition of 415 reveals the lack of any clear plan: the official instructions for the expedition are to assist the Eggestaeans and re-establish Leontinoi (though unlike Diodorus [12.83], Thucydides does not report any Leontinian appeal to Athens),²² supplemented by the vague 'and generally to further Athenian interests in Sicily in whatever way they thought best' (6.8.2 cp. D.S. 12.83). This may be compatible with outright conquest,²³ but it hardly provides unambiguous direction as to ends, let alone means, so it is hardly surprising that once the generals arrived in Sicily they had three quite different ideas as to how to proceed: assist Eggesta as instructed, use diplomatic means to build a coalition which would enable them to achieve the two specific objectives by military force or the threat of it, or attack Syracuse immediately (6.47–50.1). As is well known, Thucydides has Demosthenes endorse the last option when he arrives with the relief force (7.42.3), but that judgement is surely shaped by hindsight:²⁴ given that the Athenians ended up attacking Syracuse directly, it could have been better done, but that does not make it the only viable possibility. The scope for legitimate disagreement between the generals proves that even if the assembly aspired to outright conquest,²⁵ there was no consensus as to how

it was to be achieved, or perhaps even what it meant; in fact, the epigraphic evidence that at some, presumably earlier, stage command by a single general was considered (*ML* 78 b2–3) suggests that in Thucydides' assembly the whole proposal is in a state of flux, a feeling which the response to Nikias' later interventions tends to strengthen. No wonder that Timaios (if it was he) felt the need for the generals to be given a clearer steer.

In point of fact, the narrative also acknowledges other possible motives beyond outright conquest: one of the real reasons given for the first expedition is to prevent the import of corn to the Peloponnese (3.86.4). In other words, there is a perfectly comprehensible explanation in terms of security, perhaps with the Corinthians particularly in view.²⁶ Alkibiades likewise argues for a deterrent aspect to the expedition: the reason for acquiring allies in Sicily was 'in order that they should be a thorn in the flesh of our enemies in Sicily, and so prevent them from coming here to attack us' (6.18.1), a worry which Athenagoras likewise attributes to the Athenians a little later (6.36.4). Security considerations are very much to the fore in Euphemos' speech at Kamarina: the Athenians are in Sicily for their own security (6.83.2–3), to create a counterpoise to deter the Syracusans from intervention in the Aegean (6.84.1–2, 85.1), a coalition of the willing. To be sure, this supports Euphemos' claim that strong independent allies are in Athens' interest,²⁷ and it too could be influenced by hindsight, of course, given the post-413 sequel, but the reasoning is perfectly coherent in its own terms. The important conclusions are twofold: first, there was clearly a diversity of views expressed about what the expedition was for and how to achieve its aims;²⁸ and secondly, if there is no sign of a clear plan of campaign, it is even less likely that there was an explicit post-victory strategy.

Indeed, one might pause to wonder for a moment if the Athenians ever had such a strategy for *Sparta*. Inasmuch as they did, it is impossible to believe that it ever entailed the enslavement or obliteration of Sparta: Perikles' stated aim of outlasting her²⁹ implies continued co-existence, and even if the occupations of Pylos and Kythera were meant to frighten her, Athens only ever encouraged helot desertion, even in 413, and never revolt; unlike Epameinondas, she never threatened to destroy the Spartan system.³⁰

Even if we take the policy of enslavement in its own terms, there must be serious questions as to whether it was feasible. Presumably annihilation of adult males on the model of Melos or Skione was impractical on grounds of scale, but that surely applied almost as well to enslavement: in the Copenhagen Polis Centre's *Inventory of archaic and classical poleis*, the territory of Skione is listed as order 2, that is, under 100 km², while Torone and Melos are order 3, 100–200 km² – the latter specifically 151 km². By contrast, Selinous and Syracuse are both order 5, over 1000 km²: indeed

Syracuse, which in the fourth century controlled some 12,000 km², is far and away the largest of Hansen's thirteen 'super *poleis*', while the sources for Selinous indicate a population of 20–30,000.³¹ It was one thing to enslave (most of) the inhabitants of Hykkara (6.62), some 7,500 of them: the sheer logistics of extending that to Selinous, let alone Syracuse, would have been formidable. Furthermore, neither extermination nor depopulation was ever thorough: just as Milesians escaped 'netting' by the Persians, so even some Skioneans and Melians survived to be restored by Lysander.³² Hence the Athenians would almost certainly have faced a substantial security problem in controlling the territory of Syracuse once conquered, let alone the rest of Sicily. Nikias is made to point out before the expedition that whereas the Athenians have some hope of controlling rebellious Aegean allies, there are so many Sicilians and they are so remote that they would be difficult to govern and impossible to control (6.11.1), and Euphemos makes the same point to the Kamarinaeans: 'we cannot remain here without your help, and even if we were to turn to the bad and make conquests, we could not retain control with communication so long by sea and the impossibility of garrisoning major cities with resources comparable to those of mainland centres' (6.86.3, tr. Hammond). Given the security situation, the cleruchy option as applied to Mytilene and Melos was out of the question,³³ and even attempting to garrison Syracusan territory would have tied down thousands of troops.

And that itself was not a mode of control which the Athenians had used very extensively or effectively, even in wartime, as the fragility of the garrisons in the Chalkidian *poleis* in the face of Brasidas suggests:³⁴ in the end, the allied cities were chiefly controlled by the deterrent effect of Athenian naval power, supplemented by collaboration from elements in the allied elite and the lingering external threat of Persia.

None of that had much purchase in Sicily. To the extent that there was a 'super-power threat', it came chiefly from Syracuse herself: that this was the common Sicilian perception is tacitly acknowledged by Hermokrates at the Conference of Gela, where he describes himself as 'the representative of a very great city and more likely to be interested in aggression than self-defence' (4.64.1), and more openly at Kamarina, where he allows that other cities might be frightened of Syracuse and happy for her to be harmed so as to be taught a lesson (6.78.2) – and indeed his rather threatening tone in that speech helps to explain why this might be the case. Phaiax had traded sufficiently successfully on fears of Syracusan expansionism, particularly in relation to Leontinoi, to win over Akragas as well as Kamarina in 422 (5.4.5–6), and Euphemos exploits the persistence of those fears: 'the aim of the Syracusans is to rule over you, and their policy is to

make you unite on the basis of your suspicions of us and then to take over the empire of Sicily themselves, either by force or, when we have retired without achieving anything, because there will be no-one to dispute it with them' (6.85.3); he likewise cites the fate of Leontinoi as evidence of continuing Syracusan machinations and of the dangers of having such a powerful city always close at hand (86.3–4, 87.5). Neutralising that threat was bound to disturb the balance of power, raising problems which I shall consider at the end of this chapter. On the other hand, Carthage is the dog that does not bark in the night: despite the events of 480, she does not feature in Thucydides as a threat to the Sicilian Greeks,³⁵ but rather as a potential ally who will share their suspicion of Athens (6.34.2), to which colour is given by the stated ambitions of Alkibiades (6.15.2, 90.2). Here, certainly, despite the impending sequel (below, p. 61), there is a total absence of hindsight.

What is said about Alkibiades and Carthage naturally directs our attention to this aspect of Athenian objectives as Thucydides presents them. This looks even more questionable than the enslavement of Syracuse, particularly in the form in which the exiled Alkibiades describes it to the Spartans (6.90): if Alkibiades' idea that, having conquered Magna Graecia and Sicily, the Athenians would then subjugate Carthage is, as Hornblower puts it,³⁶ 'spectacularly improbable', the final stage, in which the Athenians concentrate the resources of the entire western Mediterranean on the Peloponnese, envisages taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut (and says something about his, or Thucydides', perception of Spartan paranoia).³⁷ Were it not for the mention of Carthage in Aristophanes cited earlier, one might almost wonder whether the Last Plans of Alexander had not somehow leaked backwards in time.³⁸ Yet Thucydides not only credits him authorially with this ambition (6.15.2), but has Hermokrates anticipate support from that quarter because of Carthaginian fears (6.34.2). Nothing seems to come of this, and in fact it is only the Athenians who are credited in the narrative with an approach to Carthage (6.88.6), and if that was equally unproductive, we do at least have tantalising epigraphic evidence of continuing diplomatic interaction as late as 406.³⁹ Contrary to Hermokrates' expectations, the Carthaginians were apparently quite content to watch events unfold from a distance; if any Athenians did have designs on them, they can never have got beyond the concept stage.

The practical difficulties of the enslavement option prompt one to wonder whether there might have been an alternative; and perhaps there was. After the Athenians complete the first stage of their attempted circumvallation by finishing the double wall down to the sea, we are told

that Syracusan morale was at such a low ebb that, despairing of military victory, they began to discuss a negotiated settlement, and made overtures in this regard to Nikias (6.103.3). Although nothing came of this at the time, that was evidently not the end of the matter. One piece of information which Thucydides withholds until a late stage is that Nikias was in touch with individuals within Syracuse who were not only providing intelligence on the situation inside the city but actually wanted to hand over control to Athens (7.48.2, 49.1; cp. 73.3, 86.4), and Nikias, as we know, had been able to make positive use of such a situation in the past: at Kythera in 424, he had been able to broker a surrender quickly and efficiently through prior dealings with inside collaborators (4.54.2–3), and to such effect that the Kythereans fought with the Athenians in Sicily (7.57.6). He may therefore have felt optimistic about repeating the trick. Who could these people have been? One aspect of Thucydides' assimilation of Syracuse to Athens (7.55.2) is that Syracuse – and perhaps other Sicilian cities, too, since he writes in the plural – was a democracy, and therefore Athens was unable to use the lever of regime change which served her well elsewhere (3.82.1).⁴⁰ Of course, the Syracusan dissidents might have been Leontinian oligarchs, a group whose integration into Syracuse after the upheavals of 422 had not gone smoothly (5.4): the Athenians were certainly prepared to deal pragmatically with oligarchs, though the implication of the Old Oligarch's assessment of some past instances is perhaps that by the 420s this was not seen as a promising option.⁴¹ Nevertheless, this could have been such a case, which would mean that political ideology was not a significant factor; but is it correct to assume that ideological factors could not possibly have played a part? Despite some politically-motivated attempts to argue to the contrary, prompted by embarrassment at a historical example of one democracy making war on another, it is clear that Syracuse was indeed a democracy, as Thucydides says, though not on the Athenian model, as has been ably argued by Keith Rutter.⁴² Indeed, there was a significant difference: the most obvious indication of the difference is the introduction after the defeat of Athens of sortition for the choice of magistrates (D.S. 13.34.6), which implies a shift towards something more radical; Aristotle would seem to confirm this when he describes the change of constitution at this time as one from *politeia* – that is, his favoured form of moderate democracy – into a democracy (*Pol.* 1304a27–9). Thus at the outset the Syracusan democracy was significantly more conservative than the Athenian version, and the reduction of the number of generals after the initial defeat from fifteen to three (6.72–3), and those with full power (καὶ ὀλίγους καὶ αὐτοκράτορας), is a strong hint that it became still more so; even before this, the capacity of

the unnamed general to guillotine debate in the initial assembly to discuss reports of the expedition (6.41.1) implies very un-Athenian powers. The same constitutional change also consolidated the personal position of Hermokrates as a leading player in subsequent events. His locking horns with a leading demagogue does not of course make him an enemy of democracy, notwithstanding his later career; nevertheless, despite what Thucydides says, it does not seem beyond the bounds of possibility that both proponents of more thoroughgoing democracy and personal opponents of Hermokrates could have seen in the possibility of collaboration with Athens an opportunity to advance their causes.⁴³

The idea that some Athenians might have been looking to a political settlement fits in with another factor which Thucydides very much downplays, the amount of diplomatic activity in the years before the expedition, something highlighted by Hornblower.⁴⁴ Again, despite the editorial position, we can nevertheless recover quite a lot of this from the detail of the narrative, though for some material we are reliant on epigraphy: the alliances with Rhegion and Leontinoi, for example, (*ML* 63 and 64 respectively), probably went back to the 440s, being renewed in 433/2. Thucydides holds back the information that Athens had a pre-existing alliance with Kamarina until the debate there – there is a veiled allusion at 6.52.1, but he is not explicit until 6.75.3 – and a ‘long-standing friendship (παλαιὰν φιλίαν)’ with Metapontion is not mentioned until 413 (7.33.4–5), when we also hear for the first time of positive support for Athens from her colony Thourioi (33.5–6), though Gylippos had earlier failed to win her over despite holding Thourian citizenship (6.104.2). The voluntary support of Naxos is noted in its proper place (6.50.2–3), and likewise the accession of Katane (6.51): the Athenians were lucky to overcome initial reluctance here, but once secured, Katane remained loyal, and even gave refuge to Athenian survivors of the final disaster (7.85.4). Athens might have gained control of Messana, too, had Alkibiades not betrayed the plot in the process of defecting (6.74.1).

Another important inscription is *IG* I³ 291, a fragmentary record of financial contributions to the Athenian cause which is probably to be dated to 415:⁴⁵ not only do the sums recorded add up to a hefty total of at least 250 talents, but the decision by person or persons unknown to record the information in permanent form at Athens is an indication that some Athenians were anticipating the establishment of arrangements which would persist in the longer term. Another feature of this inscription is several substantial contributions from the Sikels, something Thucydides also reports (6.88.4), and which is part of a larger picture of support from and cultivation of non-Greek populations in the region. In his survey of the

alliances (7.57–8) Thucydides notes Elymians, most of the Sikels, Etruscans and Iapygians; those Sikels who had been able to revolt had already supported the Athenians during the first expedition (3.103.1), and the Sikel kings Archonides and Demon had been made Athenian *proxenoi* at some date before the expedition, while the Syracusans had only those Sikels who did not defect (presumably those in the plains, because they could not). To the supporters of Athens we can add the Messapians, whose king Artas was another Athenian *proxenos*, and the Campanians, who provided much-needed cavalry.⁴⁶ All this points to sustained attempts on the part of the Athenians to build up a presence in the region, as for example in the brief account (5.4–5) of the activities of Phaiax in summer 422, shortly after the Conference of Gela, at a time when the military option had just been kicked into touch, though the core of his appeal is still a common fear of Syracuse, as we have seen. By contrast, Euphemos has to acknowledge obliquely that the size of force Nikias thought necessary for security could be counter-productive in exciting misgivings in potential allies (6.86.2), as indeed Nikias himself had worried (6.21.1) and Hermokrates had anticipated (6.33.4–5). That helps to explain why Rhegion remained neutral, though *IG* I³ 291 reveals that she contributed money, and why Kamarina had alliances with both sides (6.88). The Kamarineans had made a token contribution to the defence of Syracuse, though no more (20 cavalry, about 50 archers: 6.67.2): quite apart from reluctance to commit themselves, one can imagine that it would have been regarded as hazardous to send substantial forces away from the city given the endemic presence of *stasis* on the island. Kamarina was not the only one to sit on the fence: in the first battle at Syracuse, the only substantial support for the Syracusans came from Selinous, a specific target of the expedition, and Gela (6.67.2). Only after the arrival of Gylippos did substantial support start to flow in to Syracuse, as Athens was forced increasingly on the defensive, and important cities such as Akragas and Messana remained neutral throughout.

The diplomatic strategy proposed by Alkibiades in the council of war in 415 was therefore an extension of long-running Athenian policy, and was also perfectly viable: indeed, it was arguably only the botched implementation of the strategy of direct attack on Syracuse favoured by Lamachos which undermined it. It is surely not impossible to envisage something like a western Delian League,⁴⁷ though this time the ultimate enemy would have been Greek rather than barbarian, and there would have been a non-Greek element of Elymians and Sikels, and perhaps Italic peoples, too. Within the Greek membership, racial propaganda would presumably have been less marked: the Athenians appeal to the Rhegines to come to the aid of Leontinoi as fellow Chalkidians (6.44.3), and likewise

in their cheeky demonstration in the Great Harbour they present themselves as having come 'to restore the people of Leontinoi to their homes in accordance with alliance and kinship' (6.50.4), but the way that Hermokrates plays the racial card at Kamarina with snide remarks about 'Ionians, Hellespontines and Islanders who may change masters, but are always slaves either to the Persians or someone else' (6.77.1) suggests that this sort of appeal would have been much less effective in the melting pot of Sicily.⁴⁸ It is noteworthy, too, that the language of 'slavery' and 'liberation' used by opponents of the Athenian empire at home appears in the mouths of Syracusans alongside that of *σωτηρία* (6.76.2, 7.56.2; Athenian riposte at 6.84.3, 87.2): that perhaps suggests that the situation in Sicily is being thought of in the same terms, or as part of the same great struggle. If Hermokrates and his supporters were anticipating the spread of Athenian imperialism to the west, then what they, like the Persians, had to face was the frustration of constraints on their freedom to act rather than any more direct threat: not only did Alkibiades' policy not look for the annihilation or emasculation of Syracuse, but it surely presumed her continued existence as a substantial force, precisely because that policy rested on a regional balance of power sustained by fear of Syracusan ambitions. Both sides in the debate at Kamarina talk in terms of the concept of balance of power: Hermokrates imagines weaker cities wanting Syracuse humbled, as we saw, yet still to survive for the sake of their own security (6.78.2), while Euphemos presents Athens' allies in Sicily as a counterbalance to Syracuse (6.84.1), so whatever the authenticity of the particular speeches, it is clearly not anachronistic to imagine strategic thinking of this kind.

That brings me, finally, to the most speculative part of a speculative discussion, namely consideration of the implications of the various scenarios for Athenian success which I have been sketching out: if the Athenians *had* won, as they might have, what then? Despite everything I said earlier, I do not think that we can rule out counterproductive savagery on the part of the Athenians at home. The assembly had a record of criticising or interfering in settlements made in the field from the surrender of Poteidaia on (2.70.4), and including Nikias' agreement with Kythera (4.57.3) and the peace of Gela (above, p. 51), so the peace terms were bound to have been referred back to Athens. There, the *dēmos*' appreciation of the political and strategic realities seems to have been rudimentary, as I have suggested, and for all that their victims to date had been small *poleis* like Skione and Melos, one has a sense of an increasing readiness to impose the harshest sanctions which cannot be entirely an artefact of Thucydides' presentation.⁴⁹ Had the Athenians so resolved for Syracuse, it would surely

have taught the lessons of which Diodotos had warned,⁵⁰ and would have undermined the balance of power in the region. At best, Athens would have replaced Syracuse as the major threat to other powers, though with fewer resources on the spot (having presumably largely destroyed those of Syracuse, particularly manpower) and far more problems in supplying and sustaining them in order to maintain control; at worst, she would have provoked them to combine immediately against her. Either way, it seems to me highly improbable that Athens could have implemented the subsequent stages in Alkibiades' grand plan of conquest.

What, on the other hand, if Nikias had managed a negotiated peace on favourable terms which had left Syracuse largely intact and governed by a friendly regime? Obviously, quite apart from avoiding the practical problems of enslavement or subjugation, it would have secured the other objectives given as motives for the expedition: faced with combined Athenian and Syracusan forces, Selinous would have come rapidly to heel, there would have been no bar to the restoration of Leontinoi, and in the longer term Athens would have had control by proxy over grain exports from the West and no need to fear Syracusan intervention in the Peloponnesian War. So far, so good, but the wider regional picture looks more problematic. Fear of Syracuse was, as we have seen, a key factor behind the adherence of allies to the Athenian coalition; the Carthaginians' interest in Athens even after her failure in the west makes good sense if they in turn were still looking for a possible counterpoise to the island's Great Power. What, then, if the two had been joined together, in terms of power politics, with Athens becoming the patron of a largely undiminished Syracuse? Even if Athens could have guaranteed her good behaviour to begin with, it would surely not have been too long before Athens' friends looked to claim their reward and flex their muscles, and the misgivings of other powers in the region would surely have promoted the formation of new anti-Syracusan – and therefore anti-Athenian – groupings. Keeping the peace could have come to require a major long-term commitment of resources at a great distance from home: would that have been sustainable?

Another problem would have been political stability: a client democracy in Syracuse would hardly have been a panacea for the chronic instability which is flagged up in Thucydides' sketch of Sicilian history at the beginning of Book 6 (6.2–5), highlighted in Alkibiades' speech at Athens (6.17.2–4), and exemplified in the narrative of events. Indeed, since opponents of Athens would doubtless have made their escape, the new regime would have been bound to develop a problem with resistance from exiles in the *chōra*, a recurrent Thucydidean motif.⁵¹ Beyond this, though, is the role of Syracuse as the principal focus for would-be revolutionaries

in Magna Graecia and Sicily:⁵² would that simply have been transferred to Athens? And if so, what of those who had ideological objections to democracy, or whose own *poleis* were already democratic, or already in the Athenian orbit, or who had ambitions beyond their own *polis* which the Athenians were unlikely to sanction? Where would they have looked: to Akragas, perhaps, or even to Carthage, like Terillos in 480 (Hdt. 7.165–6)? It is hard to imagine a stable and orderly state of affairs persisting for long. In reality, of course, the Carthaginians almost immediately took the opportunity to step into the shoes of the Athenians and intervene on behalf of the Segestans against their former friends at Selinous, thus paving the way for an abortive attempt by Hermokrates to return and make himself tyrant and, ultimately, the tyranny of Dionysios.⁵³

To conclude: for the Sicilian expedition, I suggest that it is instructive to interrogate the element of hindsight not only in what was, but in what might have been, too. If counterfactual history reinstates the experience of openness and contingency in the past by considering as plausible scenarios ‘those alternatives which we can show on the basis of contemporary evidence that contemporaries actually considered’,⁵⁴ we must remind ourselves that not all contemporary judgements were equally well-founded, and that the implications of alternatives were not always fully thought through; in any case, there was always the unforeseen, as Thucydides knew well. Furthermore, although images of the ‘Garden of Forking Paths’ or of points on railway tracks tend to suggest increasingly divergent historical pathways,⁵⁵ we need always to bear in mind that events, though taking a different route, might have arrived at a similar destination, or continued on a not very different parallel track. Perhaps – to retain the railway metaphor – we should think of historical possibility as like a gigantic marshalling yard, with tracks criss-crossing to a range of potential endpoints: just as it was not inevitable that the Athenians would fail in Sicily, or that, having done so, they should be condemned to ultimate defeat (as Thucydides’ presentational shift to highlighting Athenian resistance at the beginning of Book 8 makes clear),⁵⁶ so there were multiple possible versions of success. Paradoxically, if my argument is broadly sound, the least militarily successful option, a long-term anti-Syracusan coalition sustained by a balance of power, might have been the most viable; greater success would have brought with it greater problems. And in one sense, Athens was fortunate in her failure: defeat aborted the scenario in which she did to Syracuse what she had done to Skione and Melos – and so, when her own defeat came, her crimes were less. She had destroyed middling *poleis* – as had Sparta – but not a great super-*polis* like herself, and a Dorian one to boot: had she done so, she might well have shared its fate.⁵⁷

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Notes

¹ Ferguson 1997a, cp. Roberts 2004, and even more so the political studies in Brack and Dale 2004 and Brack 2006; only Clark 2010 (cited by Pelling above, p. 6) considers contexts earlier than the Spanish Armada: doubtless the richer documentation closer to the present appeals more strongly for the density and complexity of perceived contingencies it affords. Brodersen 2000 is almost the exception that proves the rule (though Toynbee's speculations on Alexander's survival, published there in German translation, originally dates to 1969); Cowley 2001 and 2002 also include some Greek and Roman military case-studies (and even one from the ancient Near East). Antiquity has by contrast been a happy hunting ground for writers of science fiction: for example, Poul Anderson's short story 'Delenda est' (1955) has the Scipios die at the Ticinus through the machinations of rogue time-travellers, resulting in an alternative world dominated by Celtic culture.

² It is tempting to suggest that this is in turn another inheritance from epic and its "nearly" episodes, but I would be inclined with Pelling (p. 4) to distinguish between (in his phrase) a '*Schein*-virtuality' that at most marks important turning-points without a strong sense that events could *really* have been otherwise, and the genuine engagement of Herodotus and Thucydides with the contingency of actual historical events; note also Flory 1988, 48–52.

³ Baragwanath (this volume); counterfactual thinking in Thucydides is discussed by Dover 1988 and Flory 1988, and also noted as an aspect of his narrator interventions by Gribble 1998, while Will 2000 discusses subtly how Thucydides' account of Athenian conduct of the war consistently suggests an alternative scenario in which Perikles survived to guide it; n.b. also Grethlein 2010, 324–8 on 'side-shadowing' in Thucydides, though I am not convinced that his focalised counterfactuals are *simply* 'fictive', whatever their formal status. Tordoff (forthcoming) is the most thorough and subtle study to date, distinguishing between instances which are 'rhetorical' (i.e. of the epic type [n.2 above]), 'analytical' (concerned with causation) and 'inferential' (elaborating a counterfactual scenario). For Xenophon n.b. Grethlein 2011, 31.

⁴ That might account in turn for John Stuart Mill's willingness to think counterfactually about Salamis (quoted by Ferguson 1997b, 32–3) and Marathon: 'The battle of Marathon, even as an event in English history, is more important than the battle of Hastings' (1978, 273, from his review of Grote's *History of Greece*). By contrast, historians of Rome were perhaps more inclined by the character of their subject-

matter to think in terms of predestination, at least at the broadest level: Plb. 1.4 (quoted by Ferguson 1997b, 22 to this effect); likewise Livy 9.17–19 famously airs the counterfactual possibility that Alexander might have attacked Rome only to conclude that things would have been much the same (though there is much more than that going on in the passage: Morello 2002; and Hau, this volume, pp. 75–7). The fact that the classical Greek historians are close in time to the events they relate also countered the tendency to greater hindsight with distance noted elsewhere in this volume; the unpredictability of warfare is repeatedly stressed by Thucydides' speakers, and brought out in his narrative (1.78.1–2, 84.3, 122.1, 140.1, 2.11.4, 61.3, 3.59.1, 4.18.4, 64.1, 5.102, 6.78.2, 7.61.3; Stahl 2003, 75–157, esp. 94–7, 137–40).

⁵ A point well made by Pelling (this volume), pp. 13–16.

⁶ The book division is of course not Thucydidean, any more than that between books 6 and 7, though they reflect the perceptions of ancient readers.

⁷ The analysis of Stahl 2003, 194–216 brings out beautifully how many points there were at which events might have gone the other way; Rood 1998, 168–76 has another good discussion and references to earlier scholarship; see his n.66 for the celebrated remark originally quoted by Green 1970, xii: 'Whenever I re-read Book VII of Thucydides I keep hoping it'll go the other way this time'; n.b. also Connor 1984, 185–7. The contrasting readings of 7.2 by Connor 1984, 187–8, who interprets it as stating that the Syracusans have escaped (whatever the military realities) and Rood 1998, 172–5 ('does not imply total escape': 173) indicate that at a narrative level Thucydides does a good job of keeping open the readers' local sense of suspense, despite their knowledge of the ultimate outcome (see Baragwanath, p. 26, for this narrative effect; Rengakos 2006, 292–5 speaks of 'epic suspense'); Rhodes' severe judgement on Nikias (2010, 144–5) brings out the degree to which the situation was retrievable even thereafter, and Stahl 2003, 199–200 insists on the possibility of Athenian victory in the night battle on Epipolai.

⁸ For example the deferral of information about Athenian diplomatic activity before the expedition (7.1.4, 333.4; below, p. 57), and about financial pressure on Syracuse and the existence of a 'fifth column' there (7.48.2–49.1; below, p. 56). Likewise the deceit of the Segestans is hinted at near to the time at which it occurred (6.8.2) but only described when it becomes germane to the strategic context (6.46; Mader 1993).

⁹ The clearest statement of the idea is in the authorial comment at 7.55 (with which cp. 8.96.5), but see (e.g.) Connor 1984 168–76 for a discussion that traces the resemblance back to the first assembly at Syracuse (6.32–41), also 190–1; for the exchange of national temperaments see also Avery 1973, 6–8. Likewise, Syracusan naval preparations are first noted at 3.115.3, and the Syracusans and allies hold their own at sea at 4.25.1–6 (Westlake 1969, 116–17 remarks on the absence of the 'marked superiority in seamanship that the Athenians expected to enjoy'), so the presentation of their 'steep learning curve' in books 6 and 7 must owe something to stylisation.

¹⁰ On the problem of the consistency of Thucydides' judgement see e.g. Rood 1998, 159–82, esp. 159–61, 176–82; Westlake 1969, 161–73 is still relevant, especially for the οὐ τοσοῦτον... ὅσον construction.

¹¹ As Gomme 1956, 387–8 observes, though he remains agnostic, as does Rhodes 1994, 242; the historicity of the stated Athenian aims is defended by Westlake 1969, 101–22, esp. 105–10. The form of words used here might suggest thoughts of control or manipulation of affairs without actual conquest, along the lines suggested by

Euphemos at Kamarina (below, p. 59); at all events, the risk of wholesale subjection still seems to be in the future for Hermokrates at this stage (4.60.2 and n.13 below)

¹² In part perhaps because Thucydides' account is incomplete, as is clear from a papyrus fragment probably to be attributed to Antiochos of Syracuse: Bosworth 1992.

¹³ See Hornblower 1991–2008, II 223–4 for discussion and references. There is certainly a sense of tension between the apparently desultory campaign narrative and the speech (Westlake 1969, 103 judges it 'a later addition [which] seems to have a different object in view [and] is out of all proportion to its setting') which suggests that Thucydides is encouraging his readers to think ahead; Emily Baragwanath compares (*per litt.*) the similar rhetoric of a need for pre-emption directed against the Athenians by the Corinthians in their first speech at Sparta (1.68–71; there is a specific verbal echo from 1.68.3 at 4.59.2).

¹⁴ 'So extreme, in the midst of their current good fortune, was their conviction that nothing would stand in their way, that they would accomplish the practicable and the more problematic alike, whether with a great force or a weaker one. The cause was their extraordinary success in most respects, lending strength to their hopes.' (tr. Lattimore). The tone of the Aristophanic reference is very hard to judge, but however exaggerated, the notion ought surely to spring from some contemporary seed: Sommerstein 1981 *ad loc.* observes that the Sausage-Seller is 'promised dominion over Carthage' in line 174.

¹⁵ Kagan 1981, 165 objects that a fleet of 60 ships in 424 implies at least 5,000 Athenians who had served in Sicily, but if the population really had recovered to something like pre-plague levels (6.26.2), that was only some 10% of the citizen body.

¹⁶ The phrase is clearly a significant echo of 1.23.6 in a way that suggests a fresh start to hostilities, but also evokes his reference to support for kinsmen as a πρόφασις (3.86.4, noted above), an association underlined by the use of the word in this more loaded sense ('pretext') at 6.8.4, which seems to suggest not simply different levels of motivation, but also self-interested calculation.

¹⁷ See Hornblower 1991–2008, III *ad loc.*, and next note. Conquest of territory is, unsurprisingly, evoked in the context of the first land battle (6.68–9), but in terms of control or occupation (κρατεῖν, σχεῖν, ξυγκτήσασθαι) rather than subjugation.

¹⁸ Plutarch *Nic.* 1 accuses Timaios of aspiring to improve on Thucydides (and Philistos): for what that might have entailed see Pearson 1987, 142–51, esp. 150 for the present case, which he believes 'must have been mentioned by Timaeus'; the story could possibly derive from Philistos either directly, if Diodorus used him at this stage, or via Timaios. Polybius likewise criticises his re-working of Hermokrates' speech at the Conference of Gela: 12.25k–26.9 with Walbank 1967, 397–403. Hornblower discusses the Diodorus passage in the context of Thucydides' tendency to efface the role of the Boule in key decisions and considers that its historicity cannot be totally ruled out (2009, esp. 257–9).

¹⁹ For the way in which Diodorus makes his speeches complement those of Thucydides see Brock 1995, 214–16; Pesely 1985 suggests that this is essentially his equivalent of the Mytilene debate.

²⁰ Xenophon *HG* 2.2.3, 10 evokes the Athenians' fears after final defeat at Aigospotamoi of just such treatment.

²¹ As Thucydides reports at 8.2.1, and the Melians anticipated at 5.98 – and as the

Athenians predicted then (5.91.1) it is the smaller *poleis* rather than the Spartans who are described as thinking in such terms.

²² Leontinian exiles are mentioned at 6.19.1, and perhaps implied in the reference to aiding kinsmen at 6.6.1 and Nicias' disparagement of exiles at 6.12.1 (so Gomme, Andrewes and Dover 1970 *ad loc.*; Mader 1993, 181–3 nn.2, 6), but Thucydides characteristically focuses chiefly on Segesta as the *casus belli*.

²³ As Hornblower notes: 'This is official-sounding language, though vague (it covers outright conquest without undiplomatically specifying it)' (1991–2008, III 319).

²⁴ Which might be in part Demosthenes' hindsight as well as that of Thucydides: see Hornblower 1991–2008, III *ad loc.* for discussion of the question of focalisation here.

²⁵ This has been denied, particularly by Kagan 1981, 159–91 (esp. 164–73), at least for the first assembly, on the grounds that a fleet of 60 ships was inadequate to achieve that aim, though this might be to treat 'the Athenians' as more homogeneous, and realistic, than they actually were. Liebeschuetz 1968, 289–94 has a good discussion of the diversity of strategic options in 415 and their viability.

²⁶ As Salmon 1984, 129–31 suggests in discussing Korinthian dependence on imported corn; Westlake 1969, 107–8 likewise takes the motive seriously, though in terms of the Peloponnese more generally.

²⁷ Which is rather a different argument from those conventionally advanced when seeking an alliance: Pelling 2012, 284–9.

²⁸ Of course we have to allow both for characterisation through speech and for rhetorical tactics, particularly in the case of Alkibiades at Sparta, but even there, what is said ought at least to have been plausible to that audience at that time.

²⁹ Or perhaps 'winning through', as Chris Pelling suggests: περιέσθαι 1.144.1, 2.13.9, 65.7; περιγέσθαι 2.65.13; Brunt 1965, 259.

³⁰ Helots in 413: 7.26.2; contrast the explicit undertaking of the Athenians in the Peace of Nicias to join the Spartans in suppressing any helot revolt: 5.23.3. The same outlook may explain Athenian failure to capitalise on the adherence of Kythera, something on which Thucydides makes one of his explicit counterfactual comments: 4.54.3; Flory 1988, 44.

³¹ Hansen and Nielsen 2004: Skione is no. 609, Torone no. 620 and Melos no. 505; 'super *poleis*' are listed on p. 72; for the population of Selinous see p. 222.

³² Persian 'netting' of Miletos: Hdt. 6.31; Milesians reappear at 9.99.3 (n.b. Flower and Marincola 2002 *ad loc.*), 104; restoration of Skioneans and Melians: X. *HG* 2.2.9, Plut. *Lys.* 14.3.

³³ 3.50.2, 5.116.4. *A fortiori*, therefore, it must be unlikely that the hints in the text that the expedition is quasi-colonial (Avery 1973, 8–13) could ever have been realised in actuality; I suggest that they should be read as contributing to a broader sense of the army as a quasi-*polis* (Hornblower 2004, esp. 258–9), though there is perhaps also an evocation of the spirit of Salamis, when the strong sense of the fleet as community was accompanied by hints of colonisation in the west (Hdt. 8.61.2, 62.2 with Bowie 2007 *ad loc.*).

³⁴ Meiggs 1972 devotes a bare page (206–7) to garrisons among 'The instruments of empire'. Athenian garrisons are only mentioned in the revolts of Amphipolis (4.104) and Torone (4.110), but given that Lekythos was also garrisoned (4.115), it would be surprising if Mende and Skione were not.

³⁵ Livy 4.29.8 has a mysterious report of a military intervention by Carthage in a local dispute in Sicily in 431, which Ogilvie 1965 *ad loc.* (to be read with the Addendum in the 1970 reprint) does not find inherently incredible, but in any case, nothing significant can have come of it.

³⁶ 1991–2008 III, on 6.15.2.

³⁷ Though the relief at Sparta which Thucydides reports at 8.2.4 is natural enough (as well as giving the green light to their own hegemonic ambitions).

³⁸ D.S. 18.4.4–6: these included building a thousand warships for a campaign against the Carthaginians and the coastal populations of Libya and the southern coast of Europe, i.e. presumably mainly Phoenician settlements; cp. Plut. *Alex.* 68.1 with Hamilton 1969 *ad loc.*, Arr. *An.* 7.1.2–3, where the Carthaginian campaign is just the first stage of even more hyperbolic ambitions.

³⁹ *ML* 92: the inscription is tantalisingly fragmentary, but implies the presence of Carthaginian envoys at Athens, mentions Hannibal and Himilkon, and indicates the dispatch of Athenian envoys to Sicily.

⁴⁰ Nikias had already identified this as a concern at 6.20.2.

⁴¹ ps-Xen. *Ath.Pol.* 3.11: on Athenian ideological pragmatism n.b. Brock 2009, especially 155–9.

⁴² Rutter 2000; Robinson 2001 gives an illuminating account of attempts by American neocons to argue away the evidence.

⁴³ Opposition to Hermokrates is demonstrated by his deposition as general at the most critical time for Syracuse (6.103.4) and later exile (8.85.3, Xen. *HG* 1.1.27–31); hence Green 1970 204–7 takes seriously the possibility of a pro-Athenian democratic revolution, noting also Polyainos' story of a slave revolt at this time (1.43.1) as indicative of political disunity, while Cawkwell 1997, 83–5 draws attention to the legacy of the manipulation of the Syracusan citizen body during and after the Deinomenid tyranny. Samos provides a good example of violent divisions between democrats a couple of years later, in 412–11 (8.21, 63.3, 73.2 with Hornblower 1991–2008 III; Brock 2009, 154).

⁴⁴ Hornblower 1991–2008 III, 5–6 (with cross-references to discussions of particular passages); Athenian activity in the west is discussed from a western perspective by Frederiksen 1984, 103–6.

⁴⁵ The dating question is discussed by Hornblower 1991–2008 III, 458–61, favouring 415. The main argument for associating the inscription with the earlier expedition, the payment of contributions by Rhegion despite her refusal to fight with the Athenians in 415, seems perfectly explicable, as he says, as calculated fence-sitting.

⁴⁶ Archonides and Demon: 7.1.4 with Hornblower 1991–2008 III *ad loc.*; the very limited Sikeli support for Syracuse is noted at 6.88.4–5 and 7.58.3; Messapians: 7.33.4 with Hornblower *ad loc.*; Campanian cavalry: DS 13.44.1–2 with Frederiksen 1984, 106 and n. 162.

⁴⁷ Liebeschuetz 1968 290–1 had already suggested the idea, though in somewhat different terms (perhaps because he was apparently unaware of *IG* I³ 291, though it was originally published in 1957). It is suggestive that the rank and file are said to have expected the expedition to generate ἄδιον μισθοφορὰν (6.24.3), i.e. to extend the perceived benefits of the Athenian Empire (Aristoph. *Vesp.* 656–724, [Xen.] *Ath.Pol.* 1.3, [Arist.] *Ath.Pol.* 24.3 with Rhodes 1981 *ad loc.*, Plut. *Per.* 11.4, 12.4–6).

⁴⁸ The survey of alliances in 7.57–8 brings out clearly how allegiances crossed racial lines in this case (stressed in the editorial preamble at 7.57.1); Alty 1982 is still the

classic account of the importance of racial divisions at this time, and for the link back to the Persian wars n.b. also Thomas 2004. Earlier, at Gela, Hermokrates had been able to appeal to Sicilian unity (τῇ Συκελῖα πάσῃ 4.59.1; τὴν πᾶσαν Συκελίαν 60.1, 61.2) as transcending racial divisions in the face of the threat posed by the Athenians (61.2–4, 64.3–4).

⁴⁹ Even with the largest *poleis* there is some sense of an increase in severity, from Thasos (loss of walls and fleet, imposition of indemnity: 1.101.3) to Samos, where these sanctions are supplemented by atrocities against individuals, on Duris' account: *FGH* 76 F 66–7; he is scornfully dismissed by Plut. *Per.* 28.1–2, but both Stadter 1989 *ad loc.* and Shipley 1987, 116–17 are inclined to see some truth in the stories. By the time of Mytilene, the merciful option entails the execution of more than a thousand men (3.50.1).

⁵⁰ 3.46–7, esp. 46.1–3 on the danger of driving rebels to prepare better and hold out to the bitter end.

⁵¹ E.g. 1.115.4, 3.32 (Samos); 3.85, 4.46 (Kerkyra); 4.52 (Lesbos); 4.75 (Samos and Lesbos); compare the dispossessed citizens of Leontinoi at 5.4.4.

⁵² *Stasis* and Syracuse: 4.1.2 (Messana), 25.7 (Kamarina), 5.4.3 (Leontinoi), 6.74.1 (Messana again), 7.50.1 (Akragas). Thucydides also alludes to disruptive movements of population carried out by the Syracusans and their tyrants: 6.4.2, 5.3, 94.1.

⁵³ Carthaginian intervention: D.S. 13.43.6–44.6, 54.1–62.6 (their change of sides from Selinous to Segesta is noted at 55.1), 79.8–80.7, 85–90; Hermokrates' return, abortive coup and death: 13.63, 75.2–9; rise of Dionysios: 91.3–96.4 – all before the end of the Peloponnesian War.

⁵⁴ Ferguson 1997b, 83–9 (quotation from p. 86).

⁵⁵ Ferguson 1997b, 68–71 (alluding to a short story by Borges); Stahl 2003, 217; one might compare the philosophical conception of an infinite number of parallel universes. Of course those writing alternative histories will naturally incline to divergence so as to attract readers.

⁵⁶ Thucydides himself seems to be playing off contemporary expectations against actual outcomes in 8.1–2: after their total defeat the Athenians expect an immediate attack on the Piraeus and have no expectation of survival, and 'the whole of Hellas' is ready to revolt and believes it impossible that Athens will survive the following summer ('it'll all be over by Christmas'); but of course in this case he has already flagged up Athenian resilience and survival for a number of years at 2.65.12.

⁵⁷ For the reasons behind that – again contrary to widespread expectation – see Powell 2006.

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THE SHADOW OF WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN:
SIDESHADOWING IN THUCYDIDES
AND XENOPHON

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It is a common observation that the difference between narrative and reality is the fact that narrative is structured. It has a beginning and an end, placed at meaningful moments in the story, and at the end the reader feels a satisfied sense of closure because the whole, when looked at from the vantage point of the end, displays a complete and unified structure. In this type of hindsight, the reader is usually able to identify certain themes with which the narrative has been concerned. Life, on the other hand, is messy. It has a natural beginning and end point, but they often do not happen at any meaningful points in any ‘story’, and what comes in between is not necessarily structured or concerned with any identifiable themes. Life does not have a plot.

Another difference between life and narrative is that narrative can be shaped by foreshadowing. Foreshadowing, to take the metaphor seriously, allows the future to cast a shadow into the present, thus giving the characters populating the present – or at least the reader of their story – an inkling of what is going to happen in the future. In real life the future cannot be felt so tangibly; we do not go around our daily lives plagued by foreshadows of the waterpipe that is going to leak and flood our house next week, the affair that is going to end our marriage next year, or the death of a loved one some time in the future.

This discrepancy between narrative and life has been pointed out forcefully by the narratologist Gary Saul Morson. He argues that foreshadowing can only happen in a ‘closed temporality’ where the future is predetermined; that foreshadowing is only possible if the future has already been decided, i.e. if there is only one possible future. Foreshadowing, he argues, is an example of ‘backwards causation’, where some features of the present are caused by the future, not by the past. This regularly happens in literature, where both the ending and the way to get there have been pre-determined by the author, but in order to believe in

foreshadowing in real life, you would need to be a predeterminist or fatalist (Morson 1994).

This is all very convincing, even obvious, when pointed out in this manner. However, it seems to relate exclusively to fiction rather than to historiography. Surely, no one uses foreshadowing in a serious historical narrative? Well, foreshadowing as such may not be a staple of historiography, but many historiographers nevertheless write about the past as if there had always only been one possible outcome – namely the present – and as if the people living in the past should have known what was going to happen. We could call this ‘hindsight as foresight’; Morson borrows a term from Michael André Bernstein and calls it ‘backshadowing’ (Bernstein 1994). The phenomenon is linked with the tendency to write teleological historiography as if the past had been a linear process towards one specific goal. Such history has been written consciously by ideological historians from Neo-classicists to Marxists and Liberalists and has been vividly criticised in the past,¹ but even many historians who have tried to write about the past objectively have inadvertently fallen into the trap of expressing themselves as if what happened in the past was the only thing that could happen. This can happen out of what Morson terms *chronocentrism*, the tendency unconsciously to regard our own time as somehow privileged and ‘right’ in terms of knowledge, attitudes, opinions, and prejudices – or it can be an inadvertent by-product of turning history into narrative, because narrative almost automatically imposes not just a beginning, a middle, and an end on the historical events it narrates, but also themes, plots, and subplots, all of which only emerge in the clarity of hindsight.²

So, how can we avoid applying such hindsight to history? Morson’s answer is the invention of the concept *sideshadowing*. Whereas foreshadowing allows the future to ‘cast a shadow’ into the present and so allows the reader some degree of knowledge about what is yet to happen, sideshadowing allows possible alternative presents to ‘cast shadows’ into the narrative’s actual present and allows the reader some degree of knowledge about what might have been. The advantage of this technique, Morson argues, is a closer approximation of the narrative to reality, where the future is never set in stone and every moment offers a myriad of different possible futures, of which only one will be realised.³

One type of sideshadowing in historiography is counterfactual history. By writing about what did not happen, but might as well have happened, some modern historiographers have shown the importance of the choices made and the coincidences realized in pivotal historical situations and so have forced the reader to become aware of the ease with which history

could have gone in a different direction.⁴ However, such elaborate accounts tend to acquire a life of their own and develop into entertaining showpieces without saying much about what it actually *felt* like to live in that specific time with the uncertainty of the future – in Greece on the eve of the Battle of Salamis or in Italy just before the Battle of Actium. More subtle techniques of sideshadowing seem to be needed. I believe we can see such techniques being employed by some of the ancient historiographers. Before examining these, however, I want first to exemplify the opposite, namely ancient historiographers who write backshadowing accounts on the basis of chronocentrism.

One such backshadowing ancient historiographer is Polybius. He has often been criticised for judging historical characters according to their level of success so that the successful are praised for their foresight and skill at planning while the unsuccessful are censured for their shortsightedness and carelessness.⁵ Arthur Eckstein (1995) has shown that this description of Polybius' practice is too black and white and that Polybius also applies criteria such as honour and dignity when judging the characters of his *Histories*, but it remains true that his work is characterised by hindsight, by backshadowing rather than sideshadowing. A typical example is this passage:

Σχεδὸν δὴ πάντες οἱ συγγραφεῖς περὶ τούτων ἡμῖν τῶν πολιτευμάτων παραδεδώκασι τὴν ἐπ' ἀρετῇ φήμην, περὶ τε τοῦ Λακεδαιμονίων καὶ Κρητῶν καὶ Μαντινέων, ἔτι δὲ Καρχηδονίων· ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ περὶ τῆς Ἀθηναίων καὶ Θηβαίων πολιτείας πεποίηνται μνήμην. ἐγὼ δὲ ταύτας μὲν ἐὼ, τὴν γὰρ Ἀθηναίων καὶ Θηβαίων οὐ πᾶν τι πολλοῦ προσδεῖσθαι πέπεισμαι λόγου διὰ τὸ μήτε τὰς αὐξήσεις ἐσχέκναι κατὰ λόγον μήτε τὰς ἀκμὰς ἐπιμόνους, μήτε τὰς μεταβολὰς ἐνηλλαχέναι μετρίως, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐκ προσπαίου τινὸς τύχης σὺν καιρῷ λάμψαντας, τὸ δὴ λεγόμενον, ἔτι δοκοῦντας ἀκμὴν καὶ μέλλοντας εὖτυχεῖν, τῆς ἐναντίας πείραν εἰληφέναι μεταβολῆς.

Nearly all historiographers who have written about these constitutions have reiterated their reputation for excellence; I mean the constitutions of Sparta, Crete, and Mantinea as well as Carthage. Some have also mentioned the ones of Athens and Thebes. I for my part am willing to admit the excellence of the three former, but I am absolutely convinced that the constitutions of Athens and Thebes do not deserve prolonged mention because they did not evolve in a rational manner, did not attain lasting power, and did not undergo change moderately. Rather, suddenly, when some kind of fortune had shone on them, so to speak, at an opportune time, while they still seemed powerful and people thought they would remain successful, they experienced a complete reversal. (Polybius 6.43)⁶

Polybius goes on to argue in some detail that the power of Athens and Thebes was due to a few remarkable individuals and disappeared with their

deaths. What is striking is the complete lack of acknowledgement that things could have turned out differently, that Athens or Thebes could have continued victorious, and perhaps even gone on to conquer as much of the world as the Rome of Polybius' *Histories*. The very real power of Athens and Thebes is described as *μη κατὰ λόγον*, 'irrational', apparently because it was brief – seen in hindsight – and ended violently. There is no attempt at imagining how formidable that power must have seemed to contemporaries or to explain its downfall. From the vantage point of the 2nd century BC the hegemony of both states seemed destined to be shortlived, and the historiographer and his reader can shake their heads pityingly at the fact that the people living in the 4th century had not foreseen the reversals of their fortunes.

Conversely, from Polybius' vantage point the world domination of Rome seems the only possible outcome of the past. Witness this famous passage from his preface:

τὸ γὰρ τῆς ἡμετέρας πραγματείας ἴδιον καὶ τὸ θαυμάσιον τῶν καθ' ἡμᾶς καιρῶν τοῦτ' ἔστιν ὅτι, καθάπερ ἡ τύχη σχεδὸν ἅπαντα τὰ τῆς οἰκουμένης πράγματα πρὸς ἓν ἔκλινε μέρος καὶ πάντα νεύειν ἠνάγκασε πρὸς ἓνα καὶ τὸν αὐτὸν σκοπὸν, οὕτως καὶ δεῖ διὰ τῆς ἱστορίας ὑπὸ μίαν σύνοψιν ἀγαγεῖν τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσι τὸν χειρισμὸν τῆς τύχης, ᾧ ἐκέρχεται πρὸς τὴν τῶν ὅλων πραγμάτων συντέλειαν.

The special feature of my work and the amazing fact of our times is that, just as *tychē* has made almost the whole world lean towards one destiny and has forced everything to incline towards one and the same end, in the same way it is necessary through my history to create an overview for my readers of the manipulation of affairs which *tychē* has used to accomplish the consummation of her whole plan. (Polybius 1.4.1)

I have argued elsewhere (Hau 2011) that Polybius' use of *tychē* in this passage does not mean that he subscribed to a religious belief in Fate. Nonetheless, there is an inescapable sense of *telos*: just as 'almost the whole world' (ἅπαντα τὰ τῆς οἰκουμένης πράγματα) is now leaning towards Rome, the reader senses that every event in the past has been one step in the long process towards Roman world dominance. It is an interesting, but ultimately unanswerable, question whether Polybius did this on purpose: if asked, would he have argued that Roman hegemony over the known world had been inevitable? Or did he fall into the trap of chronocentrism inadvertently?

Whatever Polybius' level of consciousness about the issue, historiographers of Rome's rise to power seem to have been especially prone to such chronocentric backshadowing. An obvious example is this passage from the preface of Livy:

ad illa mihi pro se quisque acriter intendat animum, quae vita, qui mores fuerint, per quos viros quibusque artibus domi militiaeque et partum et auctum imperium sit; labente deinde paulatim disciplina velut desidentes primo mores sequatur animo, deinde ut magis magisque lapsi sint, tum ire coeperint praecipites, donec ad haec tempora, quibus nec vitia nostra nec remedia pati possumus, perventum est.

I would like each reader individually to turn his mind to the following: what life, what customs, through what men and by what methods, both at home and in war, the empire was created and increased; then, when discipline begins to slip, let him first follow in his mind the, as it were, downward spiralling customs, then notice how they slip more and more and then go into free fall, until it has come to these times where we cannot stand either our vices or their remedy. (Livy *Praefatio* 9)

The slippery slope of increasingly corrupt morals is presented as inexorable, the grim outcome as inevitable once the slippage had begun. Admittedly, this is an extremely rhetorical passage from Livy's showpiece preface, and any added sideshadows, any suggestions that the corruption might have been halted somewhere along the way, would have detracted from its impact. Nevertheless, it is symptomatic of Livy's approach to historiography. In his work, even counterfactuals are used to show that history really could have gone no other way. Witness this passage relating to the beginning of the Second Punic War:

His anxius curis ita se Africo bello quod fuit sub recentem Romanam pacem per quinque annos, ita deinde nouem annis in Hispania augendo Punico imperio gessit ut appareret maius eum quam quod gereret agitare in animo bellum et, si diutius vixisset, Hamilcare duce Poenos arma Italiae inlaturos fuisse quae Hannibalis ductu intulerunt. Mors Hamilcaris peropportuna et pueritia Hannibalis distulerunt bellum.

Upset by these troubles he [Hamilcar] conducted himself in the African War (which took place for five years immediately after the conclusion of peace with Rome) and then for nine years in Spain while the Carthaginian dominion was spreading, in such a way as to make it clear that he was planning a war bigger than any in which he was presently engaged, and that, if he had lived longer, the Carthaginians would have taken the invasion, which they actually carried out under Hannibal, to Italy with Hamilcar as their commander. The premature death of Hamilcar and the youth of Hannibal postponed the war. (Livy 21.2.1)

So, if Hamilcar had lived longer, he would have attacked Italy himself – in fact, he would have taken *exactly the same war* to Italy as Hannibal eventually did. The only difference would have been in the commander, everything else would have turned out just the same. This complete confidence in the privileged status of the historiographer's own particular present can be seen even more stunningly in a passage famous for being our only ancient

example of sustained counterfactual history: Livy 9.17–18 speculating on what would have happened if Alexander the Great had lived to attack Rome.⁷ The passage is too long to quote here in its entirety, so I have included only its beginning:

tamen tanti regis ac ducis mentio, quibus saepe tacitus cogitationibus volutavi animum, eas evocat in medium, ut quaerere libeat quinam eventus Romanis rebus, si cum Alexandro foret bellatum, futurus fuerit. Plurimum in bello pollere videntur militum copia et virtus, ingenia imperatorum, fortuna per omnia humana maxime in res bellicas potens; ea et singula intuenti et universa sicut ab aliis regibus gentibusque, ita ab hoc quoque facile praestant invictum Romanum imperium. Iam primum, ut ordiar ab ducibus comparandis, haud equidem abnuo egregium ducem fuisse Alexandrum; sed clariorem tamen eum facit quod unus fuit, quod adulescens in incremento rerum, nondum alteram fortunam expertus, decessit. Ut alios reges claros ducesque omittam, magna exempla casuum humanorum, Cysrum, quem maxime Graeci laudibus celebrant, quid nisi longa vita, sicut Magnum modo Pompeium, vertenti praebeuit fortunae? Recenseam duces Romanos, nec omnes omnium aetatum sed ipsos eos cum quibus consulibus aut dictatoribus Alexandro fuit bellandum, M. Valerium Corvum, C. Marcium Rutulum, C. Sulpicium, T. Manlium Torquatum, Q. Publilium Philonem, L. Papirium Cursorem, Q. Fabium Maximum, duos Decios, L. Volumnium, M'. Curium? Deinceps ingentes sequuntur uiri, si Punicum Romano praevertisset bellum seniorque in Italiam traiecisset. Horum in quolibet cum indoles eadem quae in Alexandro erat animi ingeniiue, tum disciplina militaris, iam inde ab initiis urbis tradita per manus, in artis perpetuis praeceptis ordinatae modum venerat.

However, the mention of such a great king and commander prompts me to express publicly the reflections which I have often turned over in my mind, and so I want to ask the question what would have happened in Roman history if Rome had been at war with Alexander [the Great]. What seems to carry most weight in war is the number and quality of troops, the genius of the commanders, and fortune, which has power over all human endeavours, and especially in war. When these factors are considered both individually and collectively, they guarantee that the Roman empire would easily have remained unconquered also by him, just as by other kings and peoples. Now, in the first place, to begin with a comparison of commanders, I do not deny that Alexander was an exceptional commander. But what made him especially famous was the fact that he did not have to share his fame, and that he died while he was still a young man and his power was still growing, before he could experience adverse fortune. Not to mention other famous kings or commanders, who offer examples of the changeability of human fortune, let us take Cyrus, whom the Greeks praise and celebrate: what delivered him into the hands of changing fortunes if not his long life, just as happened recently with Pompey? Shall I enumerate the Roman commanders, not everyone from every age, but only those whom, as consuls or dictators, Alexander would have had to fight: M. Valerius Corvus, C. Marcus Rutulus, C. Sulpicius, T. Manlius Torquatus, Q. Publilius Philo, L. Papirius Cursor, Q. Fabius Maximus, the two Decii, L. Volumnius,

M'. Curius? Some immensely great men follow immediately upon these, if Alexander had chosen to undertake the war against Carthage first and cross over to Italy when he was older. In every one of these was found the same natural ability of heart and mind as in Alexander; and as for military training, it had been transferred from generation to generation right from the origin of the city and had been turned into an art-form regulated by eternal rules. (Livy 9.17)

The passage continues with a detailed argument to the effect that even if Alexander had lived to attack Rome, he would easily have been defeated. Thus, nothing about the present would have changed. Rome would have had one more war to look back on with pride, but apart from that its history would have run the same course as it did, and the present would look exactly as it does now. It does not bother Livy that back in the time of Alexander the Great no one worried much about Rome or whether or not Alexander might attack it; that question only became interesting when Rome grew into the greatest warrior nation of the Mediterranean. This makes the passage not only a stunning piece of chronocentrism, but also a perfect example of backshadowing, i.e. of projecting the concerns of the present into the narrated past.

After these examples of backshadowing, chronocentric historiography it is now time to see how it could be done differently. So we turn to Thucydides.

On one level, Thucydides is guilty of a certain amount of backshadowing: he has worked the events of the recent past into a narrative with a beginning, a clear progression of plot, and some significant themes, all of which can only be done in hindsight and makes the written account differ from any lived experience of the period. It is indicative of how much the past has been narrativized in his account that Hunter Rawlings (1981) on the basis of the work's narrative structure felt able to predict how it would have ended if Thucydides had lived to carry through his plan.⁸ However, Thucydides is also the ancient historiographer who most regularly engages in sideshadowing in order to show that events could, in fact, have turned out differently. Let us examine some of the sideshadowing techniques he employs.

One technique is the *explicit mention of a potentially different outcome, or counterfactual statements*.⁹ One famous passage falls into this category, namely the last-minute saving of the Mytileneans from massacre:

καὶ τριήρη εὐθὺς ἄλλην ἀπέστελλον κατὰ σπουδὴν, ὅπως μὴ φθασάσης τῆς προτέρας εὐρώσι διεφθαρμένην τὴν πόλιν· προεῖχε δὲ ἡμέρα καὶ νυκτὶ μάλιστα. παρασκευασάντων δὲ τῶν Μυτιληναίων πρέσβειον τῇ νηὶ οἶνον καὶ

ἄλφιτα καὶ μεγάλα ὑποσχομένων, εἰ φθάσειαν, ἐγένετο σπουδὴ τοῦ πλοῦ τοιαύτη ὥστε ἥσθιον τε ἅμα ἐλαύνοντες οἶνω καὶ ἐλαίῳ ἄλφιτα πεφυραμένα, καὶ οἱ μὲν ὕπνον ἥρουντο κατὰ μέρος, οἱ δὲ ἤλαυνον. κατὰ τὴν δὲ πνεύματος οὐδενὸς ἐναντιωθέντος καὶ τῆς μὲν προτέρας νεὼς οὐ σπουδῇ πλεούσης ἐπὶ πρᾶγμα ἀλλόκοτον, ταύτης δὲ τοιοῦτῳ τρόπῳ ἐπειγομένης, ἡ μὲν ἔφθασε τοσοῦτον ὅσον Πάχητα ἀνεγνωκέναι τὸ ψήφισμα καὶ μέλλειν δράσειν τὰ δεδομένα, ἡ δ' ὑστέρα αὐτῆς ἐπικατάγεται καὶ διεκώλυσε μὴ διαφθεῖραι. παρὰ τοσοῦτον μὲν ἡ Μυτιλήνη ἦλθε κινδύνου.

Immediately another trireme was sent out in all haste, since they feared that, unless it overtook the first trireme, they would find on their arrival that the city had been destroyed. The first trireme had a start of about twenty-four hours. The ambassadors from Mytilene provided wine and barley for the crew and promised great rewards if they arrived in time, and so the men made such speed on the voyage that they kept on rowing while they took their food (which was barley mixed with oil and wine) and rowed continually, taking it in turn to sleep. By chance they had no wind against them, and as the first ship was not hurrying on its distasteful mission, while they were pressing on with such speed, what happened was that the first ship arrived so little ahead of them that Paches had just had time to read the decree and prepare to carry it out, when the second ship put in to the harbour and prevented the massacre. So narrow had been the escape of Mytilene. (Thucydides 3.49.2–3 [translation adapted from Rex Warner])

Everything that makes this narrative dramatic – the mention of what is at stake both at the beginning of the passage and at the end, the gritty details of the crew's efforts to make speed, the repetition of the verb φθάνω, the explicit statement that they only made it due to the weather, ruled by *tyche* – all of this aims to show the reader two things: how easily the events could have turned out differently, and what that anxiety about the future felt like for the people involved. There is no hint of hindsight or backshadowing here; the reader feels transported into that very time when the crew of the second trireme were exerting themselves in order to catch up with the first, and with those sailors he feels anxious about the outcome. When the issue is resolved, we are in no doubt that it might as well have turned out differently: the Mytileneans might as well have been destroyed despite the Athenian change of heart; it was only due to human effort and *tyche* that they were saved.

The same technique of explicitly pointing out how easily things could have gone differently is employed in less dramatic fashion in numerous places throughout Thucydides' *History*. A typical example is this brief passage from the events surrounding the Battle of Amphipolis:

Βρασιίδας δὲ ἐβοήθει μὲν τῇ Τορώνῃ, αἰσθόμενος δὲ καθ' ὁδὸν ἐαλωκυῖαν ἀνεχώρησεν, ἀποσχὼν τεσσαράκοντα μάλιστα σταδίους μὴ φθάσαι ἐλθόν.

ὁ δὲ Κλέων καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τροπαῖά τε ἔστησαν δύο, τὸ μὲν κατὰ τὸν λιμένα, τὸ δὲ πρὸς τῷ τειχίσματι, καὶ τῶν Τορωναίων γυναῖκας μὲν καὶ παῖδας ἡνδραπόδισαν, αὐτοὺς δὲ καὶ Πελοποννησίους καὶ εἴ τις ἄλλος Χαλκιδέων ἦν, ξύμπαντας ἐς ἑπτακοσίους, ἀπέπεμψαν ἐς τὰς Ἀθήνας· καὶ αὐτοῖς τὸ μὲν Πελοποννήσιον ὕστερον ἐν ταῖς γενομέναις σπονδαῖς ἀπῆλθε, τὸ δὲ ἄλλο ἐκομίσθη ὑπ' Ὀλυνθίων, ἀνὴρ ἀντ' ἀνδρὸς λυθείς.

Brasidas was coming to relieve Torone, but while he was on his way he heard that it had been captured, and so he turned back, having come forty stades short of arriving in time. Kleon and the Athenians put up two trophies, one by the harbour and one by the wall, enslaved the women and children of the Toroneans, and sent the Toronean men, the Peloponnesians, and any Chalkidean they found back to Athens. This amounted to 700 men. Of these, the Peloponnesians were given back later during the truce, and the rest were exchanged for prisoners taken by the Olynthians, man for man. (Thucydides 5.3.3–4)

This is a different kind of narrative from the Mytilenean one. It is faster paced, there are no telling details of food or specific measures taken by commanders, no intimations of the feelings of any of the participants. The remark that is interesting for our purposes is ‘he had been about four miles short of arriving in time’ (ἀποσχὼν τεσσαράκοντα μάλιστα σταδίου μὴ φθάσαι ἐλθόν). Why tell us that in the middle of such a fast-moving narrative of events? Surely part of the reason is to show how easily things could have gone differently. If Brasidas had only marched a little faster or been quicker to set out, he might have reached Torone in time. Then the women and children of Torone would not have been enslaved, the men would not have been sent to Athens, and the Athenians would have had less leverage when negotiating the Peace of Nikias and the prisoner exchange with the Olynthians. This would certainly have meant a momentous difference in many individual lives, and might potentially have changed the outcome of the entire Archidamian War. As opposed to his practice in the Mytilene passage, Thucydides does not express this alternative outcome explicitly, but only hints at it. And again the verb φθάνω is used to show the closing off of alternatives.¹⁰

Another sideshadowing technique employed by Thucydides is the *expression of unfulfilled expectations*. A famous example of an elaborate narrative of unfulfilled expectation in indirect speech is the beginning of book 8 where the Athenians have received the news of the disaster in Sicily:

ἅμα μὲν γὰρ στερόμενοι καὶ ἰδίᾳ ἕκαστος καὶ ἡ πόλις ὀπλιτῶν τε πολλῶν καὶ ἱππέων καὶ ἡλικίας οἷαν οὐχ ἑτέραν ἐώρων ὑπάρχουσιν ἐβαρύνοντο· ἅμα δὲ ναῦς οὐχ ὀρώντες ἐν τοῖς νεωσοίκοις ἱκανὰς οὐδὲ χρήματα ἐν τῷ κοινῷ οὐδ' ὑπηρεσίας ταῖς ναυσὶν ἀνέλπιστοι ἦσαν ἐν τῷ παρόντι σωθήσεσθαι, τοὺς τε ἀπὸ τῆς Σικελίας πολεμίους εὐθὺς σφίσιν ἐνόμιζον τῷ ναυτικῷ ἐπὶ τὸν

Πειραιᾷ πλευνεῖσθαι, ἄλλως τε καὶ τοσοῦτον κρατήσαντας, καὶ τοὺς αὐτόθεν πολεμίους τότε δὴ καὶ διπλασίως πάντα παρεσκευασμένους κατὰ κράτος ἦδη καὶ ἐκ γῆς καὶ ἐκ θαλάσσης ἐπικεῖσεσθαι, καὶ τοὺς ξυμμάχους σφῶν μετ' αὐτῶν ἀποστάντας.

Both the city and each person in it were oppressed by the loss of so many hoplites and cavalymen and particularly of more men of military age than they saw left living. At the same time they saw that there were not sufficient ships in the shipsheds, nor money in the treasury, nor rowers for the ships, and they despaired of surviving the present situation. They believed that their enemies from Sicily would make a seaborne attack on the Piraeus because they had already beaten them so soundly, and that the enemies from nearer by would now redouble their efforts and attack them in force on both land and sea, and that their allies would revolt and join them. (Thucydides 8.1.2–3)

The desperateness of the situation is expressed as if it was real: ‘they *saw* (έώρων, όρώντες)’ the inadequacy of their men, ships, and financial resources. And yet we know that Athens fought on for another ten years, often successfully. Scholars have often remarked on this discrepancy and wondered what Thucydides’ purpose was: was he trying to force the reader to respect and admire the resilience of the Athenians? Or did he, perhaps, write this passage early, soon after the event, when he was one of those who did not believe that Athens would pull through? I would venture a different explanation. When we as modern historians look at a passage like this and wonder what on earth was in the author’s mind, we are engaging in chronocentric backshadowing. We are reading as if the Athenians of 413 *should have known* that they would be able to fight on and that Sicily was not going to be their final downfall. In fact, of course, they did not know this. Some probably thought so, but it is likely that Thucydides is correct in his assessment of the prevailing atmosphere in Athens at the time. Moreover, he has attempted to recreate that atmosphere in his writing so the reader can experience it for himself, thereby learning more fully what that situation was *really like* than he possibly could from any backshadowing account along the lines of two modern works, whose descriptions of this situation are respectively, ‘The immediate crisis was or was perceived to be imperial, the threatened break-up of the empire (8.2.2;4). There were some creaking noises as we shall see, but the break-up did not happen’ (Hornblower 1991, 173) and ‘[Athens] failure [in Sicily] decided the war, and thereby determined that Greek history would not go the way of Italian history’ (Davies 1993, 133).¹¹

The expressions of unfulfilled expectations are not always as elaborate as here; sometimes they are much briefer, the alternative outcome being allowed to cast only a quick shadow across the actual outcome.¹² This

example recounts the Athenian reaction to the Spartan foundation of Herakleia in Trachis:

οἱ δὲ Ἀθηναῖοι τῆς πόλεως ταύτης ξυνοικιζομένης τὸ πρῶτον ἔδεισάν τε καὶ ἐνόμισαν ἐπὶ τῇ Εὐβοίᾳ μάλιστα καθίστασθαι, ὅτι βραχύς ἐστιν ὁ διάπλους πρὸς τὸ Κήναιον τῆς Εὐβοίας. ἔπειτα μέντοι παρὰ δόξαν αὐτοῖς ἀπέβη· οὐ γὰρ ἐγένετο ἀπ' αὐτῆς δεινὸν οὐδέν. αἴτιον δὲ ἦν οἱ τε Θεσσαλοὶ ἐν δυνάμει ὄντες τῶν ταύτῃ χωρίων, καὶ ὧν ἐπὶ τῇ γῇ ἐκτίζετο, φοβούμενοι μὴ σφίσι μεγάλη ἰσχύϊ παροικώσιν, ἔφθειρον καὶ διὰ παντὸς ἐπολέμουν ἀνθρώποις νεοκαταστάτοις, ἕως ἔξτερύχωσαν γενομένους τὸ πρῶτον καὶ πάνυ πολλούς.

When this city was founded, the Athenians were first afraid and thought that it had been established with designs on Euboeia because of the short crossing to Kenaion in Euboeia. In the event, however, things turned out contrary to expectations for them and the city came to pose no threat at all. The reason was that the Thessalians, who were powerful in this area and on whose land the city had been founded, were afraid that their new neighbours would become a major force and therefore kept making destructive raids on the colonists until they had ground down their previous strength. (Thucydides 3.93.1–2)

Here, the unfulfilled expectation of the Athenians is given a perfectly reasonable justification in the position of Herakleia, as opposed to the actual outcome, which is marked as unexpected – and unexpectable – by the expression *παρὰ δόξαν*. This phrase becomes an adjective in late Classical Greek and is extremely common in the Hellenistic historiographers, but in Thucydides it is only found as a prepositional phrase and is fairly rare (7 occurrences). In this passage he uses it to show the reader how what actually happened was not what was most likely to happen, i.e. how the present we live in is not necessarily the most likely result of the past that has gone before it.¹³

Finally, there is the technique of *reporting advice which was ignored*. A typical example is the case of Alkidas, the Spartan general sent to help the Mytilenaeans in their revolt. On his way there he receives reports that the city has fallen. He then receives this detailed advice from one of his Elean allies:

‘Ἀλκίδα καὶ Πελοποννησίων ὅσοι πάρεσμεν ἄρχοντες τῆς στρατιᾶς, ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ πλεῖν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ Μυτιλήνῃν πρὶν ἐκπύστους γενέσθαι, ὥσπερ ἔχομεν. κατὰ γὰρ τὸ εἰκὸς ἀνδρῶν νεωστὶ πόλιν ἐχόντων πολὺ τὸ ἀφύλακτον εὐρήσομεν, κατὰ μὲν θάλασσαν καὶ πάνυ, ἢ ἐκεῖνοί τε ἀνέλπιστοι ἐπιγενέσθαι ἂν τινα σφίσι πολέμιον καὶ ἡμῶν ἢ ἀλκῇ τυγχάνει μάλιστα οὔσα· εἰκὸς δὲ καὶ τὸ πεζὸν αὐτῶν κατ’ οἰκίας ἀμελέστερον ὥς κεκρατηκότων διεσπάρθαι. εἰ οὖν προσπέσοιμεν ἄφνω τε καὶ νυκτός, ἐλπίζω μετὰ τῶν ἔνδον, εἴ τις ἄρα ἡμῖν ἐστὶν ὑπόλοιπος εὖνους, καταληφθῆναι ἂν τὰ πράγματα’

‘Alkidas and Peloponnesian fellow commanders, I propose that we sail against Mytilene before we are discovered, just as we are. Most likely, as the

men have only recently got possession of the city, we shall find their guard down in many places, on sea especially, where they do not expect that an enemy might attack them and where our strength especially happens to lie. Probably their land-army will be dispersed in the various houses carelessly relaxing now that they have been victorious. So if we were to fall on them suddenly at night, I expect that with the help of those inside the city, if there is anyone left alive who is on our side, we might well take the place.' (Thucydides 3.30.1–2)

Alkidas does not follow the plan, but turns around to sail back to the Peloponnese, casually executing some captured merchants on the way. It has been pointed out by others that the level of detail of the advice and its apparent soundness makes it likely that Thucydides thinks Alkidas should have acted on it. But I would argue that it is not just there to put Alkidas in a bad light (although that is doubtless part of its purpose). What the detailed advice also does is conjure up an image in the reader's mind of an alternative fate for Mytilene, one where it was relieved by the Spartans before the Athenians could even hold the sinister Mytilenaeon Debate. That is, it acts as a sideshadow on the historical reality, showing us what might have been, alongside what was.¹⁴

After this brief overview of sideshadowing techniques, it is time now to look more systematically at the *History* of Thucydides in this light. It has often been argued that one of the characteristics of Thucydides' *History* is a narrative where one event follows what has gone before naturally and *inevitably* in a way that makes any alternative versions unthinkable, as if there was no other possible outcome.¹⁵ The examples given as evidence for this typically come from Book 1, and it is certainly true that the *Archaeologia* and *Pentecontaëtia* are composed from a strongly chronocentric standpoint and are streamlined towards one seemingly inevitable endpoint. Such teleological inevitability is characteristic to a lesser degree of much of Book 1, where every event, every action, every human choice seems to lead inexorably to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War.¹⁶ However, I would argue that different parts of Thucydides' *History* are imprinted with different 'shadows of time'. While Book 1 is characterised by backshadowing, which leads to a feeling of inevitability, Books 2–6 and Book 8 are full of sideshadows: time in these parts of the work is open, life is uncertain, the possibilities are endless. All of the examples of sideshadowing presented above come from this part of the *History*. In book 7, however, where the Sicilian Expedition turns sour for the Athenians, sideshadowing is replaced by backshadowing and even foreshadowing, and the result is a feeling of impending doom.

Jacqueline de Romilly in a famous study (1967, especially pp. 48–49) analyses in great detail the narrative of the wall-building race between the

Athenians and Syracusans at the end of Book 6 and beginning of Book 7. Among other things she shows how Thucydides' elimination of all but the most essential events makes the outcome seem necessary, as if that was the only outcome possible. I am convinced by her analysis, but would like to add a few observations on the topic of sideshadowing, backshadowing, and foreshadowing.

When Gylippos first leads the Syracusans into battle against the Athenians, Thucydides says:

ἔτυχε δὲ κατὰ τοῦτο τοῦ καιροῦ ἔλθων ἐν ᾧ ἑπτὰ μὲν ἢ ὀκτὼ σταδίων ἤδη ἀπετετέλεστο τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ἐς τὸν μέγαν λιμένα διπλοῦν τεῖχος, πλὴν κατὰ βραχὺ τι τὸ πρὸς τὴν θάλασσαν (τοῦτο δ' ἔτι ᾠκοδόμουν), τῷ δὲ ἄλλῳ τοῦ κύκλου πρὸς τὸν Τρωγίλον ἐπὶ τὴν ἐτέραν θάλασσαν λίθοι τε παραβεβλημένοι τῷ πλεονί ἤδη ἦσαν, καὶ ἔστιν ἅ καὶ ἡμέτερα, τὰ δὲ καὶ ἐξειργασμένα κατελείπειτο. παρὰ τοσοῦτον μὲν αἱ Συράκουσαι ἦλθον κινδύνου.

He happened to come at this very moment when seven or eight stades had already been completed by the Athenians of a double wall down to the Great Harbour, except for a short section down by the sea (this they were still in the process of building), and for the other section, from the Circle to Trogilos and the sea on the other side, stones had already been piled up alongside; some parts were half-finished, others had been left behind completed. So narrow was the escape of the Syracusans. (Thucydides 7.2.4)

Why has Thucydides not told the reader about the progress of the Athenians' wall earlier? Why are we only told after the Syracusans prevent them from completing it? The concluding statement 'So narrow was the escape of Syracuse' (παρὰ τοσοῦτον μὲν αἱ Συράκουσαι ἦλθον κινδύνου) echoes the end of the Mytilene passage quoted above.¹⁷ It is a sort of retrospective sideshadowing, or sideshadowing in hindsight; it does not put us in the Athenians' place or allow us to imagine with them their hopes for the completion of the wall – and not only because it is focalized through the Syracusans – rather, it allows us the tiniest glimpse of a potentially different outcome of the events, but only after that potentiality has been closed off and no longer exists. Such retrospective sideshadowing does not give the story an air of *inevitability* exactly, I think, but of completedness, pastness, unchangeability because it has already happened. It draws attention to the hindsight with which both the author and the reader contemplate the events and so emphasizes the fact that they are mere on-lookers, powerless to change anything in the story that is unfolding before them – much like an audience spell-bound by the disastrous chain of events in a fifth-century tragedy.¹⁸

The air of tragedy and doom in the wall-building passage, and in Book 7 generally, is enhanced by the use of not sideshadowing, but foreshadowing. At the moment when the Athenians decide to face the

Syracusans in battle in order to prevent them from completing their counter-wall and so destroy any chance the Athenians have of taking Syracuse, Thucydides describes their thoughts:

ὁ δὲ Νικίας καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι νομίζοντες, καὶ εἰ ἐκεῖνοι μὴ ἐθέλοιεν μάχης ἄρχειν, ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι σφίσι μὴ περιορᾶν παροικοδομούμενον τὸ τεῖχος. ἥδη γὰρ καὶ ὅσον οὐ παρελγύθει τὴν τῶν Ἀθηναίων τοῦ τεύχους τελευτὴν ἢ ἐκείνων τεύχεσις, καί, εἰ προέλθοι, ταῦτόν ἥδη ἐποίει αὐτοῖς νικᾶν τε μαχομένοις διὰ παντός καὶ μὴδὲ μάχεσθαι, ἀντεπῆσαν οὖν τοῖς Συρακοσίοις.

Nikias and the Athenians believed that, if the other side refused to begin battle, they themselves must not stand by and ignore the completion of the cross-wall. For this wall now all but passed the end of the Athenian wall and, if it should proceed beyond it, it would make no difference if they fought and won continuous battles or did not fight at all. Therefore they marched out to meet the Syracusans. (Thucydides 7.6.1)

The Athenians are said to imagine a possible and undesirable outcome of future events, and they then act to prevent this. It is a storyteller pattern that often functions as a sideshadow: if the Athenians had gone on to be victorious in the battle, their pre-battle musings would be a powerful reminder to the reader that the battle had been a pivotal point where things could have turned out differently and thereby changed the outcome of the entire war. As it is, the Athenians are defeated in the battle and their expressed fears come true. What we have, then, is not sideshadowing, but foreshadowing.

Foreshadowing is a technique that lends itself to the creation of an atmosphere of inevitable disaster, and in Book 7 Thucydides repeatedly uses it to this effect.

Let me sum up my reading of Thucydides: Book 7 uses foreshadowing to create a sense of doom, small doses of sideshadowing to hint at possible alternative outcomes at the very moment when they are no longer possible, and teleological backshadowing to make the Athenian disaster seem inevitable. Book 1, likewise, uses backshadowing to make the outbreak of the war seem unavoidable. In the middle part of the *History*, however, Thucydides' narrative is characterised by sideshadowing, which highlights pivotal moments in the narrative – those moments which Stahl (2003) has called 'hinges', and which are pivotal exactly *because* the result could come out either way. Stahl argues that these moments held a particular interest for Thucydides – as they surely do for all historians – and the examples of sideshadowing provided here confirm this. By employing various techniques of sideshadowing, Thucydides ensures that, although his readers know how it is all going to turn out, still, at the same time, we also read *as if* things could turn out differently. It is this interplay of inevitability

and the impossible possibility of an alternative outcome that makes reading Thucydides such a devastating experience; this is what makes his historiography feel so close to tragedy.

Before concluding, I would like to show briefly that Thucydides is not alone among ancient historiographers in using sideshadowing to great effect. Perhaps surprisingly, Xenophon does it too. Space limitations prevent me from going into much detail, but a few examples may suffice. One obvious instance is the end of the narrative of the Battle of Koroneia:

ἐνταῦθα δὴ Ἀγησίλαον ἀνδρεῖον μὲν ἔξεστιν εἰπεῖν ἀναμφισβητήτως· οὐ μέντοι εἶλετό γε τὰ ἀσφαλέστατα. ἔξόν γὰρ αὐτῷ παρέντι τοὺς διαπίπτοντας ἀκολουθοῦντι χειροῦσθαι τοὺς ὀπισθεν, οὐκ ἐποίησε τοῦτο, ἀλλ' ἀντιμέτωπος συνέρραξε τοῖς Θηβαίοις· καὶ συμβαλόντες τὰς ἀσπίδας ἐωθοῦντο, ἐμάχοντο, ἀπέκτεινον, ἀπέθνησκον. τέλος δὲ τῶν Θηβαίων οἱ μὲν διαπίπτουσι πρὸς τὸν Ἑλικῶνα, πολλοὶ δ' ἀποχωροῦντες ἀπέθανον. ἐπεὶ δ' ἡ μὲν νίκη Ἀγησιλάου ἐγεγένητο, τετρωμένος δ' αὐτός προσενήνεκτο πρὸς τὴν φάλαγγα, προσελάσαντές τινες τῶν ἱππέων λέγουσιν αὐτῷ ὅτι τῶν πολεμίων ὡς ὀγδοήκοντα σὺν ὅπλοις ὑπὸ τῷ νεῷ εἰσι, καὶ ἡρώτων τί χρὴ ποιεῖν. ὁ δέ, καίπερ πολλὰ τραύματα ἔχων, ὅμως οὐκ ἐπελάθετο τοῦ θείου, ἀλλ' ἔαν τε ἀπιέναι ἢ βούλονται ἐκέλευε καὶ ἀδικεῖν οὐκ εἶα. τότε μὲν οὖν, καὶ γὰρ ἦν ἡδὴ ὀψέ, δειπνοποιησάμενοι ἐκοιμήθησαν.

At this point Agesilaos may undisputedly be called brave; he did not, however, choose the safest option. For while it was possible for him to let the men pass who were trying to fight their way through and then to follow them and attack those in the rear, he instead clashed with the Thebans front to front. And setting shield against shield they pushed, fought, killed, and were killed. In the end some of the Thebans fought their way through towards Mount Helikon, but many others were killed in the retreat. When the victory had fallen to Agesilaos and he himself, wounded, had been carried to the phalanx, some of the horsemen rode up and told him that about eighty of the enemy, with their arms, had taken refuge in the temple, and they asked him what they should do. And although he had received numerous wounds, he nevertheless did not disregard the god, but ordered them to allow the men in the temple to go away to whatever place they wanted, and did not allow them to commit any wrongs. Then (for it was already late), they had their evening meal and went to sleep. (Xen. *Hell.* 4.3.19–20)

There are two instances of sideshadowing in this passage. The first one is a counterfactual description of Agesilaos' and the Spartans' actions in the battle. By turning the reader's attention to what Agesilaos *did not* do, Xenophon not only shows us the unexpectedness of Agesilaos' actions, but also holds up for a moment the possibility that the battle might have been fought differently and thus, perhaps, might have ended differently. Similarly, in the second instance of sideshadowing in the passage, the

information that Agesilaos *did not* disregard the god makes the reader contemplate that other possibility for a moment: the wounded Spartan king ordering his men to cut down the enemy soldiers seeking refuge in the temple – before returning to the much more serene reality of an evening meal and sleep. Both instances could be called counterfactuals, or ‘emphasis through negation’, and their primary function is probably to shed light on Agesilaos’ character. At the same time, however, they cast sideshadows from an alternative reality into the narrative, and the reader is left with the sense that events could easily have turned out differently – if Agesilaos had been a different man from the one he was. Indeed, it is not hard to imagine that the 80 Boiotian soldiers huddling together in the temple were debating this very question among themselves: What kind of man is Agesilaos? Will he storm the temple and attack us? Will he burn it to the ground? Or will he let us go? The brief sideshadow lets the reader see the different possibilities, like paths forking out from a single timeline.

Most of the sideshadowing in the *Hellenika* is of this kind.¹⁹ It is probably no coincidence that both Thucydides and Xenophon wrote about events of their own lifetimes, events in which they themselves had taken part, or for which they had consulted eyewitnesses. After only a short temporal gap the possibilities that had been there, but had been closed off when other choices had been made, were perhaps more visible, more present to the memory, than for Polybius or Livy looking back over 200 years to the Theban hegemony or the Second Punic War.

It will be fitting to end with another example from Xenophon, one where he uses the technique of expressing unfulfilled expectations to great effect. It is the very last words of the *Hellenika*:

τούτων δὲ πραχθέντων τοῦναντίον ἐγένετο οὐ ἐνόμισαν πάντες ἄνθρωποι ἔσεσθαι. συνεληλυθίας γὰρ σχεδὸν ἀπάσης τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ ἀντιτεταγμένων, οὐδεὶς ἦν ὅστις οὐκ ᾔετο, εἰ μάχη ἔσοιτο, τοὺς μὲν κρατήσαντας ἄρξειν, τοὺς δὲ κρατηθέντας ὑπηκόους ἔσεσθαι· ὁ δὲ θεὸς οὕτως ἐποίησεν ὥστε ἀμφοτέροι μὲν τροπαῖον ὡς νενικηκότες ἐστήσαντο, τοὺς δὲ ἰσταμένους οὐδέτεροι ἐκώλυνον, νεκροὺς δὲ ἀμφοτέροι μὲν ὡς νενικηκότες ὑποσπόνδους ἀπέδοσαν, ἀμφοτέροι δὲ ὡς ἡττημένοι ὑποσπόνδους ἀπελάμβανον, νενικηκέναι δὲ φάσκοντες ἑκάτεροι οὔτε χώρα οὔτε πόλει οὔτ’ ἀρχῇ οὐδέτεροι οὐδὲν πλέον ἔχοντες ἐφάνησαν ἢ πρὶν τὴν μάχην γενέσθαι· ἀκρισία δὲ καὶ ταραχὴ ἔτι πλείων μετὰ τὴν μάχην ἐγένετο ἢ πρόσθεν ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι. ἐμοὶ μὲν δὴ μέχρι τούτου γραφέσθω· τὰ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἴσως ἄλλω μελήσει.

At the end of this battle, the opposite had happened to that which everyone had expected. For considering that almost all of Greece had come together and were ranged against each other, everyone had thought that, if a battle would take place, the victors would rule and the vanquished would become their subjects. But the god made it so that both sides set up trophies as if

victorious, but neither side prevented those who were setting them up, and both sides granted a truce for the collection of the dead as if victorious, but both sides also collected their dead under a truce as if defeated. Although claiming to have won the victory, each side turned out to have no more land, cities, or power than before the battle took place. There was more uncertainty and confusion in Greece after the battle than before it. Let the history up until this point suffice for me; what followed will perhaps be the task of another. (Xenophon *Hell.* 7.5.26–27)

By reporting the expectations of ‘everyone’, Xenophon briefly sets up an alternative world, where peace reigns, albeit at the price of the domination of one state over the rest of Greece. The tone of the entire passage is sad and resigned, and the sideshadow of this other, peaceful reality adds to that feeling. Instead of such a well-ordered, resolved state of affairs, we have ‘uncertainty and confusion’ (ἀκρίσια καὶ ταραχή). In the face of such inexplicable, meaningless history the narrator throws up his hands and leaves the continuation of the narrative to someone else. This ending – along with the non-preface of the work – is immensely effective in showing the un-narrative character of the past, in demonstrating that history does not make a neat story.

And on this note we might conclude. History is not the same as story. Foreshadowing and backshadowing turn the past into a packaged story much like a novel, with a beginning, middle, end, a plot, and some central themes. Sideshadowing alerts the reader to possible alternative outcomes, to that myriad of different futures which were all realisable at some point in the past. It recreates some of the experience of living in that past and makes the reader realize that what is now our past was once someone else’s future, and as open and unpredictable as the future is today. By being alert to the restrictions and advantages of these three narrative tools we can understand ancient historiography better and gain a truer picture of the ancient past.

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Notes

¹ Classically by Butterfield 1931.

² The unavoidable narrativisation of the past when writing historiography has, of course, been brought to the attention of modern historians by Hayden White. See e.g. White 1987.

³ Sideshadowing has made an appearance in only a few contributions to Classical scholarship. When I delivered this paper at the Celtic Conference in Classics in Edinburgh in 2010, I was aware of only two items: Liveley 2008 (on Ovid's *Heroides*) and Pagan 2006 (on Tacitus). Since then has appeared Grethlein 2010, which (pp. 242–280) discusses Thucydides' narrative of the Sicilian Expedition partly in terms of sideshadowing, thus overlapping somewhat with the middle section of this paper. However, Grethlein uses the concept only to argue that 'Thucydides' narrative foregrounds 'the contingency of chance' as a major factor in history; he does not discuss differences in this respect between different books of the *History*, and he only discusses one of the passages analysed in the present paper – in short, our studies complement each other rather than retread the same ground.

⁴ See e.g. the very entertaining essays in Ferguson 1998.

⁵ See e.g. Pédech 1964, Walbank 1972 and 1974, and Sacks 1980. On Polybius and the general question of hindsight, see the chapter of Felix Maier in the present volume.

⁶ All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

⁷ For a good close reading of this passage along with a detailed discussion of scholarship on it and speculation about a 'tradition of counterfactual boasting' in Rome see Morello 2002.

⁸ Rawlings argues on the basis of a detailed and largely convincing analysis of the parallels between books 1–3 and 6–8 that Thucydides envisioned a work of 10 books ending with an 'Athenian Dialogue' to mirror the Melian Dialogue.

⁹ This aspect of Thucydides' *History* has been discussed briefly by Dover 1981. Interestingly, Dover feels the need to defend the existence of counterfactual statements in Thucydides, and he does so by sensibly stating that 'We expect a historian to tell us what matters; and in order to decide what matters, what made the difference, he needs to pose and answer in his own mind questions about what would have happened if something had been otherwise'. Dover counts 20 occasions of counterfactuals in Thucydides' narratorial voice.

¹⁰ Some other examples are: Thuc. 4.54 where Nikias has in secret negotiated with the Kytherians and now gets them to surrender on favourable terms: 'Otherwise the Athenians would have expelled the population of the island, since they were of Spartan blood and their island lay so close to Laconia'; and 4.106 where Thucydides as a character in his own *History* does not arrive in time to save Amphipolis, but saves Eion: 'he (Brasidas) was within a night of taking Eion too. If the ships had not arrived so quickly to relieve it, it would have been in his hands by dawn.'

¹¹ Davies continues: 'There a dominant power, Rome, imposed its authority, commanded preponderant resources, and ultimately merged its sovereignty in a larger-scale entity. Greece was to continue to be polycentric, competitive, spoiling, and subject to influence and pressure from outside.'

¹² Another elaborate example of an expression of unfulfilled expectations as a means of sideshadowing is 8.96 on the possibility that the Peloponnesians could take the Piraeus and the entire Athenian empire after the fall of Euboia, used as an example

of an elaborate counterfactual by Dover 1981. Dover discusses in detail 7.42.3, but with the purpose of deciding whether or not the passage is meant to reflect Thucydides' own thoughts rather than with a view to discussing the wider implications of counterfactuals in the *History*.

¹³ Another interesting example is 2.83: 'the Corinthians did not imagine that the twenty Athenian ships would venture on a battle with their own force of forty-seven ships' (translation by Rex Warner) – recreating the (lack of) foresight of contemporaries.

¹⁴ Further examples of advice ignored: 3.77 and 3.79. See also 3.113: 'if the Akarnanians and Amphilochians had been willing to follow the advice of Demosthenes and the Athenians and to seize Ambrakia, they could have done so without striking a blow' (translation by Rex Warner). As it was, they were victorious, but caused a major bloodbath.

¹⁵ De Romilly (1967, 47–48 and 1971) discusses the feeling of inevitability surrounding the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in Thucydides. See also Ostwald 1988.

¹⁶ See especially 1.23 with the discussions of de Romilly 1971 and Ostwald 1988 1–5.

¹⁷ This repetition is highlighted by Hornblower (1994, 158–9), who describes it as a rhetorical use of a Homeric/poetic counterfactual.

¹⁸ This passage is also briefly discussed by Grethlein 2010 as an example of sideshadowing in Thucydides, but he does not discuss the sense of inevitability.

¹⁹ An example is *Hell.*5.4.64: 'After sailing round the Peloponnese Timotheos went straight on to Kerkyra and took the island over. However, he did not enslave the inhabitants nor banish individuals nor change the constitution. The result of this conduct was to make all the states in that area better disposed towards Athens.' (translation by Rex Warner)

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SPARTAN SUPREMACY: A 'POSSESSION FOR EVER'?
EARLY-FOURTH-CENTURY EXPECTATIONS
OF ENDURING ASCENDANCY

Helen Roche

Introduction

Sparta's fall, at and following the battle of Leuktra (371), encouraged the theme, with hindsight, of Spartan overconfidence. Arrogant self-assertion on the part of the Lakedaimonians could be presented as contributing to Sparta's loss of hegemony – either because it left her unprepared, in secular terms, for the challenges which Thebes presented, or because (for religiously-minded writers such as Xenophon) it led to her citizens' committing wicked acts which inevitably provoked divine retribution. This pattern of reckless confidence and ill-treatment of subordinates leading to a (well-deserved) come-uppance was a favoured Greek literary theme, and it has been argued that the evidence given by historians of this period has been systematically skewed in order to provide their works with a pleasing moral schema.¹ However, although Xenophon, our main source for Sparta's history between her victory over Athens in 404 and her defeat at Mantinea in 362, may be biased, it may also be that Sparta was indeed overconfident (indeed, precedents for this can be found in earlier Spartan behaviour, as described by Herodotus and Thucydides). We shall, however, question whether any unusual degree of short-sightedness was involved on Sparta's part.

This chapter will briefly trace some of the ways in which hindsight has affected historians' views of Sparta's decline and fall, before going on to argue that Sparta's defeat in 371, and her subsequent loss of imperial power, were hardly predictable. During the period of Lakedaimonian hegemony (404–371), Spartan attitudes and behaviour towards allies and enemies (including Persia) reveal a self-assurance and a monopolisation of the perquisites of empire which do not suggest that the Spartans foresaw any such impending catastrophe.² The psychological and institutional buttressing which Spartan society fostered,³ so that Spartiates were imbued from an early age with a belief in the military supremacy of their *polis*, could

have been an important factor in causing the Spartans to reject any notion that their dominion might soon come to an end.

Military victories or defeats, particularly those with enduring political consequences, are notoriously subject to exaggeration after the fact: to be portrayed as both inevitable and predictable in their outcome.⁴ Yet it seems likely that many of the most bruited ‘causes’ of Sparta’s fall would have seemed *in prospect* less than fatal. For instance, ὀλιγανθρωπία (lack of manpower), one of the most frequently cited reasons for Sparta’s decline, had already presented significant difficulties during the Peloponnesian War⁵ – yet, given that Sparta had ultimately triumphed against Athens in 404, there would have been no pressing reason, less than a generation later, to see this problem as insurmountable. As Anton Powell has noted, ‘the extraordinary achievements of Brasidas and Gylippos, which involved almost no Spartiates, must have been soberly intoxicating’⁶ – as well as being so successful that they caused much chagrin to those commanders who had been left behind in Sparta.

Similarly, the fact that the Spartans failed to keep up with Theban tactical innovations, so that Epameinondas out-generalled and out-manoeuvred Kleombrotos at Leuktra,⁷ would hardly have been obvious until after the event – it seems doubtful that the Spartans, secure in their reputation as the ‘true craftsmen and philosophers of war’ (Plut. *Pelop.* 23.3), would have been able to foresee such a trouncing. In any case, the initial successes of Lysandros’ new model navy would surely have been sufficient to convince the Spartans that they were more than capable of responding to – and mastering – the military innovations with which other *poleis* had hoped to vanquish them. Eminent commentators (such as Paul Cartledge) have portrayed the ‘Spartan class struggle’ and inner tensions within Lakedaemonian society as the ultimate cause of the Spartan ‘crisis’. But the successful and smoothly-run suppression of the Kinadon conspiracy (399) would surely have served to calm fears of Spartan στάσις, or internecine strife.⁸

When investigating every supposed ‘cause’ of Sparta’s demise, therefore, it seems helpful to ask the question: ‘Could we have predicted a definitive downfall of Sparta at around the time that this actually happened, if our knowledge of history had come to an abrupt end before the events of 371?’ Every explanation adduced for Sparta’s loss of power should ultimately, if it implies a general rule, be able to function predictively.⁹ However, more often than not, the inherent predictability of such ‘fatal’ processes is taken as a given, without any thorough investigation of how plausible – or implausible – such prediction might have seemed to contemporary spectators.

The perils of hindsight

One of this chapter's main aims, therefore, is to suggest – perhaps provocatively – that we are not so immune to the seductions of moralising historical interpretations as we might care to think. As has been noted above, the great political upheaval resulting from Sparta's defeat at Leuktra, and her fall from the position of leading hegemonic power in Greece, elicited much moralising based on hindsight among contemporaries – whether historians, such as Xenophon, or philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle. Various reasons for this fascination with 'why Sparta failed' have been suggested; as Powell has pointed out, a study of modern journalism may reveal that 'changes of fortune [...] receive disproportionate attention as compared with static reality', and the Greeks, with their interest in the unpredictability of fate and the downfall of the mighty, would certainly have found in the fate of fourth-century Sparta a particularly satisfying case-study.¹⁰ After all, there was no shortage of Spartan failings to which loss of hegemony could easily be attributed, whether socio-economic (the power of women; the lack of manpower) or moral (neglect of the laws of Lykourgos; harsh treatment of allies provoking the gods' retribution).¹¹ A few centuries later, Diodorus Siculus' narrative of Sparta's downfall as morality-tale took this use of hindsight even further, so that his account of fourth-century Spartan affairs could almost be dubbed 'On Sparta – Or, How to Lose an Empire Through Hybris'.¹²

The religious or moralising justifications of the ancients have largely been set aside – such as Xenophon's interpretation, that Leuktra and its consequences were a divine judgement on the Spartans for illegally seizing the Theban acropolis in 382 (*Hell.* 5.4.1). They have, however, been replaced by modern accounts which suggest that Sparta's 'failure' in politico-military and socio-economic terms was a 'sin' of similar gravity. The idea that 'Sparta's most comprehensive military victory engendered or precipitated the downfall of what had long been accounted the model Greek military state' is a paradox which still fascinates.¹³

As Cartledge has noted, most modern historiography which deals with the period between 404 and 362 is concerned to pin down where Sparta went wrong 'with the benefit of hindsight', attempting to isolate those factors 'but for which [Sparta's loss of hegemony] would either not have occurred in the form it in fact took or not have been resolved in the way it in fact was'.¹⁴ When pursued cautiously, this quest for the truest causes of Sparta's fall is essential. However, modern scholars sometimes seem to overstep the mark, either by condemning the Spartans as weak-minded for not predicting and averting their own downfall, or presenting the period in such a way that Sparta's decline is often foreshadowed and presented as

inevitable. This teleology of Spartan defeat may merely be implied by titles which bring it to the fore – such as *Agésilao and the Crisis of Sparta* (Cartledge), *Agéilaus and the Failure of Spartan Hegemony* (Hamilton), *Sparta's Bitter Victories* (Hamilton), 'Warfare, Wealth, and the Crisis of Spartiate Society' (Hodkinson), or 'The Decline of Sparta' (Cawkwell). In some cases, the teleology is made more explicit by scholars' choice of vocabulary, and the way in which information is presented.

To exemplify, let us first take the concluding chapter of Humfrey Michell's *Sparta* (Cambridge 1964), in which it is stated that:

The unique and remarkable characteristics that distinguished the Spartans at the height of their glory [...] were the very qualities that led to their downfall. It is to be observed that Spartan governors sent abroad were all failures. Removed from the framework of their own rigid discipline, they were utterly unable to adapt themselves to their new conditions and they made a mess of things. They lacked the resilience that made the Athenian in the long run a better man.¹⁵

Michell goes on to dismiss Spartan minds as 'powerful but slow-moving', rejecting the Spartan land system as 'fundamentally a bad one', and decrying the financial system as 'primitive', 'absurd', and 'impossible'.¹⁶ Michell's value judgements here are clearly sweeping; what is more, he fails to explain satisfactorily how such a terrible system of administration could have survived so long. His account portrays Sparta's end as inherent in her polity from the beginning, and his analysis is therefore biased towards an underestimation and trivialisation both of the Spartans' capacities, and of their contemporary expectations regarding the future of their *polis*.

Our second example is taken from Stephen Hodkinson's notable article on 'Inheritance, Marriage and Demography: Perspectives upon the Success and Decline of Classical Sparta' (1989). Hodkinson argues that the Spartan authorities were clearly aware of a problem regarding declining citizen numbers, but that the measures which they instituted to counteract this (such as creating new privileges for fathers of three or more sons, polyandry, and the establishment of the *neodamōdeis*) 'attacked only the symptoms of the malaise and ultimately failed'.¹⁷ He concludes:

The one cardinal aspect of Sparta's decline which requires explanation is the failure of Sparta's leaders from the mid-fifth century onwards to tackle not just the symptoms but the roots of the malaise – namely, the economic difficulties facing poorer families. The problem required radical solutions such as a redistribution of land or a restructuring of the economic basis of the common messes and the link between mess membership and citizenship. Such solutions were never embraced and Sparta's leaders chose, whether consciously or not, to take instead the soft options which led to the destruction of her hegemony.¹⁸

Hodkinson's account implies that Sparta's leaders should have responded to her oliganthropic problems in a way which essentially assumes foreknowledge on their part of the consequences of their inaction, blaming them for an incomprehensible lack of foresight. Yet Hodkinson's 'radical solutions', which seem so simple to us with the benefit of hindsight, might very well have seemed both impractical and unnecessary to contemporary Spartans.

Perhaps the most wide-ranging example of this phenomenon, however, can be found in Charles D. Hamilton's two monographs, *Sparta's Bitter Victories* (1979) and *Agessilaus and the Failure of Spartan Hegemony* (1991). As noted above, Hamilton's titles alone draw attention to the implicit inevitability of Sparta's fall; further chapter- and section-headings in both works also contribute to this effect, such as 'Part Four: Sparta's Hollow Victory',¹⁹ and 'Chapter Seven: The Road to Leuctra'.²⁰ However, a close reading of both works yields a still richer seam of foreshadowing and the teleology of defeat. Hamilton's prose is imbued with the language of fateful destiny – take, for example, this passage from the first chapter of *Sparta's Bitter Victories*:

While Sparta was wearing herself out in a struggle to assert political predominance over the other *poleis* – a struggle that was doomed to meet the same failure that the Athenian attempt had met in 404 – some other Greeks were searching more creatively for other solutions to the perennial problems of autonomy and security.²¹

Similarly, when discussing the position of Sparta and Agessilaos in 379, Hamilton writes:

[Agessilaus] had passed his sixtieth year and thus was exempt from further military service. But if Agessilaus thought that he might spend the rest of his years in quiet enjoyment in Laconia, he was much mistaken. *His Theban nemesis was yet to come... The years from 379 to 371 were fateful ones for Sparta.* Its hegemony – secure, to all appearances [...] was first challenged by the liberators of Thebes, and seriously shaken at the Battle of Leuctra in 371.²²

In his discussion of 'The Socio-Economic Crisis of Fourth-Century Sparta', Hamilton also castigates the Spartan leaders' 'blindness' in not recognising 'the indications of grave social disorder', and their 'willingness [...] to content themselves with the suppression of the conspiracy' without realising 'the seriousness of the situation that had precipitated this crisis'.²³ In a passage which exemplifies Hamilton's technique of foreshadowing *par excellence*, he states that:

There is no evidence to suggest that the authorities looked beyond the immediate causes of this disorder or that they took cognisance of a problem to be solved once the ringleaders had been arrested and executed and the conspiracy was thus crushed. *They were to learn, to their distress, that the issues*

*implicit in this crisis would not disappear as easily as those who had brought it to their attention...*²⁴

Finally, Hamilton's concluding remarks to *Agesilaus and the Failure of Spartan Hegemony* show rather nicely how misleading the dramatic building-up of Sparta's defeat can be. He states categorically that 'Leuctra was one of the great turning points of history', yet the next sentence goes on to deflate the preceding rhetoric:

Although the actual military defeat suffered by the Spartans was something less than catastrophic, if unprecedented, the political and diplomatic results of the Theban victory were far-reaching indeed. To what extent contemporaries recognised the potential significance of this battle for the diplomatic and political situation in Greece is difficult to gauge.²⁵

In fact, this very idea of contemporary expectations regarding Sparta's ability to retain her hegemony deserves investigation. Was the Spartans' failure to institute the 'necessary' thorough-going socio-economic reforms predominantly due to foolish and outmoded conservatism, as some of these modern accounts seem to imply?²⁶ Rather, it may be helpful for our analysis to suggest that, for many Greeks, the prospect of Sparta's loss of power would have seemed for many years to be little more than the merest of glimmers in an irate Theban's eye.

Reconstructing ancient expectations of Sparta's continued hegemony

Firstly, there are explicit statements in the ancient sources to the effect that Sparta's defeat at Leuktra was indeed unexpected. Although Xenophon, in his fateful 'narrative of defeat' for the Spartans, does not describe the outcome of the battle as a surprise,²⁷ in Diodorus Siculus' account, probably based on the narrative of the contemporary historian Ephorus, the result of the battle is twice explicitly described as having come *παράδοξως* ('unexpectedly'): 15.1.2; 15.50.2.²⁸ In the next chapter, we are told that the Spartans were determined to reduce the Thebans to slavery, and that their implied assumption that this was eminently possible was shared both by their allies, who 'were eager for the war, confident that there would be no contest or battle, and that they would master the Boiotians without a struggle', and by the rest of Greece (15.51.2–4).²⁹ Once Archidamos' large force had joined that of Kleombrotos, so that the Boiotians were outnumbered by nearly two to one, the Spartans are described as returning to Leuktra before the battle full of enthusiasm (*πολλῆς προθυμίας* – 15.54.7).

Supplementary evidence to this effect can also be found in two of Plutarch's *Lives*. In the *Life of Agesilaos*, Plutarch remarks, with reference to Sparta's victory in the 'tearless battle' with the Arkadians in 368, that

...in the past, the Spartans had always regarded the defeat of their enemies as such a natural and commonplace event that the only sacrifice offered in the city to the gods to celebrate the victory was that of a cock: those who had taken part in the fighting never boasted of it, and those who received the news showed no special elation. (*Ages.* 33.4)

In the *Life of Pelopidas*, Plutarch notes that, during the battle of Leuktra itself, the Spartan polemarchs Gorgoleon and Theopompos 'felt certain of victory' as they advanced against the Thebans, and even once the rout had begun, the Spartans initially let the Thebans through their parted ranks because 'they thought they wanted to escape' (*Pelop.* 17).

Nor were the Spartans themselves the only ones to be shocked at their Leuktran defeat. As Cartledge has noted, with reference to the delayed reaction of Sparta's enemies in taking advantage of their catastrophe,

The power of Sparta had been a constant, a given, in the Greek interstate equation for well-nigh two centuries, and it took time for the idea to be grasped that Sparta was no longer invincible, that a new order might be created in mainland Greece.³⁰

If even the Thebans had been unable to see any hope of deliverance from Sparta's tyranny because of her military supremacy (Plut. *Pelop.* 6) – and if, even on the eve of Leuktra, three of the seven Boiotarchs who had to decide whether the Boiotians should confront the Lakedaimonians were opposed to the very idea of fighting a decisive battle³¹ – then was it really likely that the Spartans would have seen Thebes as posing a truly definitive threat to Spartan autonomy?

After all, Sparta had been indisputably the most powerful hegemon in Greece for more than a quarter of a century (if not far longer), and, if Plutarch can be believed,

[She] had never been beaten by an army smaller than [her] own, nor for that matter in a pitched battle in which the numbers were equal. For this reason [the Spartans] possessed an invincible spirit, and when they came to close quarters, their mere reputation was enough to give them an ascendancy over their enemies, since other men could not believe that they were a match for the same number of Spartans. (*Pelop.* 17.5–6)³²

What is more, Kleombrotos' march to Leuktra had been extremely successful, in that he had annihilated several Boiotian garrisons. With hindsight, Epameinondas' strategy has been hailed as a piece of innovatory genius,³³ but (as Munn has noted), it was also 'terribly risky', not least because the Spartan army was twice as large as the Thebans' force. In addition, by placing his Theban troops on the left-hand end of the battle-line, directly opposite the Spartan troops, Epameinondas was putting into

practice a strategy which had never yet been tested.³⁴ There was certainly no reason for the Spartans to predict a Theban victory at Leuktra.³⁵

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So much for the outcome of the battle itself. But even if Sparta did not foresee Leuktra as the instrument of her destruction, that would not necessarily mean that she expected her hegemony to continue exactly as it had done. So we shall next consider the evidence which implies that, following her victory over Athens in 404, Sparta did feel generally confident in her ability to impose her will on friend and foe alike.

Firstly, we find in the *Hellenica* a number of instances in which the Spartans are explicitly portrayed as confident – or overconfident – in their ability to deal with opposition. Although Xenophon was most probably writing his account of this period after Leuktra, and may thus have been inclined to highlight – or overstate – Sparta's previous self-assurance in order to explain her subsequent fall, it is unlikely that he completely invented all such behaviour. He is capable of allowing that Spartan high confidence was on occasion rationally grounded; we are thus more inclined to believe him when he portrays some instances of that confidence as unreasonably exaggerated. Furthermore, we can find corroborating evidence for some of these incidents and attitudes in the accounts given by Diodorus/Ephorus and Plutarch.

At *Hell.* 3.5.5–6, describing Sparta's reaction to Thebes' Persia-induced invasion of Phokis, a Spartan ally, in 395, Xenophon writes:

The Spartans were glad enough to have a pretext for a campaign against the Thebans, since they had been angry with them for some time... They calculated, too, that this was just the right moment for leading an army against Thebes and putting an end to Theban insolence. After the victories of Agesilaos, everything was going well for them in Asia, and they had no other war on their hands in Greece. [So] the ephors gave the orders for general mobilisation.

After the King's Peace in 386, Xenophon again informs us that

[Since] things had gone just as the Spartans wanted [...] they now turned their attention to those of their allies who had been against them in the war, or had been inclined to the side of their enemies. (*Hell.* 5.2.1)³⁶

Here indeed are moments at which, on Xenophon's plausible account, high confidence was reasonably founded. Again, following the ensuing actions against Mantinea, Phleious, and Olynthos (on which more below), Xenophon writes:

Things had certainly gone well for Sparta. The Thebans and the rest of the Boiotians were entirely under control, the Corinthians had become perfectly reliable, the Argives [...] had had their pride humbled, and while the Athenians were left isolated, all allies of Sparta who had shown any hostile feelings had been brought to heel. Thus it appeared that now at last Spartan supremacy had been well and truly established.³⁷ (*Hell.* 5.3.27)

However, on some occasions, too great a trust in their own abilities had led the Spartans into serious disaster. At Lechaion (390) Spartan disdain for peltasts (cf. *Hell.* 4.4.17)³⁸ led to the slaughter of a troop of Amyklaian hoplites who were insufficiently well-escorted, and were thus left at the mercy of Corinthian light-armed troops against whom their tactics were utterly useless (*Hell.* 4.5.11–18). This disastrous sort of overconfidence also manifests itself on numerous occasions at an *individual* level among Spartan commanders and their troops; one might pick out in particular the cases of Teleutias, Thibron and Klearchos.³⁹

Teleutias, Agesilaos' half-brother, and hitherto one of Xenophon's paradigms for excellent generalship, became so enraged at the audacity of a troop of Olynthian cavalry during the campaign against Olynthos (382) that he ordered his peltasts to charge them at the double. When the Olynthians retreated beyond a river, Xenophon tells us that 'the peltasts [...] came after them in a mood of overconfidence (θρασέως), following them across the river as though they were pursuing troops in full flight' (*Hell.* 5.3.4). When Teleutias saw that the Olynthian cavalry had charged the peltasts as they crossed the river, killing their commander and over a hundred men, 'he was infuriated. Snatching up his arms, he led the hoplites straight into battle and told the peltasts and the cavalry to pursue the enemy and go on pursuing him.' But, as Xenophon remarks, his hotheadedness was his downfall, for his attack brought him too close to the walls of Olynthos: the Spartans were exposed to missiles from the towers, and the Olynthian troops were able to fall upon them as they retreated in a disorderly manner, killing Teleutias himself, and leading to a general rout (*Hell.* 5.3.3–6).

Likewise, Thibron and his men came to grief during the Spartans' Asian campaign because Strouthas, his Persian adversary, realised that every time Thibron sent troops out on raiding expeditions, these were carried out in an undisciplined and overconfident manner (ἀτάκτως καὶ καταφρονητικῶς). Strouthas used this knowledge to charge the Spartan camp at breakfast time while Thibron, blithely unaware, was still throwing the discus with the preternaturally-fit fluteplayer Thersandros. Both were killed immediately, as were many of their routed troops (*Hell.* 4.8.18–19). A similar overconfidence led to the troops under Agesilaos (396–5) falling foul of Pharnabazos' scythed chariots as they ravaged his estates –

Xenophon writes: ‘since they never encountered any setbacks, the soldiers had got into the habit of collecting their supplies overconfidently and carelessly (καταφρονητικῶς [...] καὶ ἀφυλάκτως – *Hell.* 4.1.17).

Finally, Klearchos, the Spartan governor of Byzantion, was so convinced that no one in the city would betray it to the Athenians in his absence that he went off to the Persians in an attempt to raise resources for a grandiose naval plan which he thought would assure victory over the Athenian besiegers. ‘However,’ Xenophon comments, ‘the men who were organising the betrayal of the city got to work as soon as Klearchos had sailed away’ (*Hell.* 1.3.14–21). Given the prevalence of betrayal from within cities on such occasions (cf. in general Aeneas Tacticus or indeed Thucydides) one would have thought such confidence very much unjustified.

This passage raises a further issue, in that the betrayal was in some sense forced by Klearchos’ high-handed treatment of the Byzantines, in letting their women and children die while the Spartan and allied garrison took all the available food (*Hell.* 1.3.19). Thus we can see Spartans behaving towards their supposed allies in a reprehensible way which might seem calculated to bring about defeat, yet seemingly unaware of the likely consequences of their actions, and believing rather that their dominion over this city would remain unchallenged even if the Spartan leader left.⁴⁰

This Xenophonic picture of cavalier treatment of allies and subjects by the Spartans implies great confidence that, however badly they behaved, no retribution – human or divine – would follow. That Sparta became a byword for greedy and arrogant dominion is attested repeatedly throughout this period,⁴¹ and one could argue that if the Spartans in charge of policy had cared much about what other *poleis* thought, or believed that the latter’s complaints could ever be translated into victorious military action, they would not have behaved so arrogantly as they did, both in their exploitation of their victory over Athens, and in their monopolisation of the material perquisites of empire.⁴²

Whether or not we see Lysandros and Agesilaos as truly representative of Spartan attitudes towards hegemony, the *polis* of Sparta as a whole was at the very least complaisant for a while regarding Lysander’s establishment of harmosts and decarchies to govern as he saw fit – generally harshly.⁴³ In addition, Sparta’s allies were no longer to have an equal share in ‘the decisions of council and the fruits of victory’ as well as ‘the hazards and dangers of war’,⁴⁴ but were forced – often unwillingly – to march against blameless cities with which they had no quarrel.⁴⁵

However, the three *loci classici* of Spartan ill-treatment of allies concern Mantinea and Phleious, and the aforementioned occupation of the Theban Kadmeia by the Spartan commander Phoibidas (with

Agesilaos' connivance) in contravention of the King's Peace, with the rigged trial of the anti-Spartan leader Ismenias which followed.⁴⁶ In 385, Mantinea was ordered to demolish her fortifications because the Spartans merely suspected her of disloyalty, and when she refused, her walls were torn down, and she was forcibly reduced to four separate villages (*Hell.* 5.2.1–7; cf. Diod. Sic. 15.5). Long-loyal Phleious was ordered to accept the rule of pro-Spartan exiles in 379, and when she went back on her agreement to do so, was placed under siege for well over a year, until she capitulated (*Hell.* 5.2.8–10; 5.3.10–17, 21–25).

On another occasion, after the seizure of Peiraion by Agesilaos, we are told that he treated the Boiotian ambassadors who came to request peace 'with studied contempt' (μάλα μεγαλοφρόνως), pretending not to see them (*Hell.* 4.5.6; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 22.1).

Even allowing for some exaggeration and over-simplification on Xenophon's part, Spartan conduct in these matters does not suggest a strategy initiated by fear, but rather a belief that Sparta could act as she pleased with impunity – while giving states which might potentially cause trouble an object lesson, *pour encourager les autres*. Brutality in Spartan conduct might seem not so much a case of state terrorism arising from insecurity as a form of Sparta's famous economy of action, with severe exemplarity against some designed to prevent the need for action against others.

A similar, high-handedly confident attitude can also be discerned in Sparta's dealings with the Persian Empire – which was after all 'the greatest in extent, wealth and potential which the Western world had ever seen.'⁴⁷ Of course, the Spartans had never been averse to giving the Persians a run for their money – one need only think of their performance at the battle of Thermopylai, or their subsequent, bold request to Xerxes for 'satisfaction' for the blood of king Leonidas in the aftermath of the Persians' defeat (Hdt. 8.114). Nevertheless, the Spartans' singular and apparently qualm-free decision to follow in Agamemnon's footsteps (literally, for on the eve of the expedition Agesilaos was determined to sacrifice symbolically at Aulis) and *invade the Persian empire* (*Hell.* 3.4.1–4) was certainly an indication of great confidence in their own military capabilities.⁴⁸ What is more, their self-assurance could then have seemed justified by the initial success of their Persian exploits. Spartan commanders were able to negotiate with Persian satraps on equal terms, and often to outwit or out-general them.⁴⁹ Agesilaos himself was able to sack Sardis (Xen. *Ages.* 1.33–4) and, though his contemptuous letter to the Great King himself (Xen. *Ages.* 8.3–4; cf. Plut. *Ages.* 23.5–6) may merely be *ben trovato*, it is of a piece with other indicators of his high hopes for Persian conquest (cf. *Hell.* 4.1.2).

All in all, then, Spartan comportment during this period, in decisions both of the state and of individual commanders, and as manifested towards both friends and foes, suggests belief in Sparta's unshakeable superiority. But what could have lain behind this self-assurance?

Firstly, the course of events. Sparta had been the leading state in Greece long before Athens had even been liberated from tyranny – indeed, it was the Spartans who had done the liberating.⁵⁰ Now, the comparatively brief period during which Sparta had needed to vie actively for hegemony with Athens had culminated in a resounding victory for Sparta (*Hell.* 2.2.23). Indeed, the Greek cities (to quote Xenophon) 'would obey any order that a Spartan might give' (*Hell.* 3.1.5). The ambitious policies of Lysandros had curbed anti-oligarchic tendencies in the majority of *poleis* (excepting the failure of the Spartan-backed Thirty Oligarchs at Athens). Although, a few years later, Sparta did suffer some setbacks in the Boiotian and Corinthian Wars (which also necessitated Agesilaos' withdrawal from Asia), the Spartans had also shown a capacity to bounce back after defeat on many occasions – for example, after the battle of Kyzikos (410), or after Teleutias' demise during the Olynthian campaign (cf. Diod. Sic. 15.21.3).⁵¹

After the King's Peace, meanwhile, it is widely admitted that Sparta's successes went from strength to strength (as we have seen); Diodorus Siculus tells us that 'the Spartans were an object of terror to all because of the strength of their hegemony' (15.23.4).⁵² The prevalence of oligarchic fifth columns within cities should also not be forgotten (Elis and Phleious are cases in point)⁵³ – these presented yet another reason for the Spartans to be confident that, even if a city were to rebel against them, they would still be able to regain control of it easily, now that Athens was no longer such a power to be reckoned with. Sparta had become the single Greek superpower.

So, although Sparta's military record in the years before Leuktra was not left unblotted by various failures – with one in particular allegedly 'ominous prelude' to Leuktra being the battle of Tegyra (376),⁵⁴ where a small band of Thebans under Pelopidas routed a much larger Spartan troop – most of these could probably have been discounted or explained away by the Spartans, who would not have been so likely to see, at the time, the pattern of decline pointed up subsequently by the 'narratives of defeat'. Rather, they could have seemed mere regrettable, momentary blips in a fairly steady record of victory. And Haliartos (395), the battle at which Lysandros was killed? 'That would have been fine if that wretched Pausanias hadn't got there too late!' is the reaction implied by the subsequent death sentence which the Spartans passed on that king in his absence. Setbacks at Plataia, Thespiiai and Tanagra in the 370s? Plutarch gives the Spartan excuse here:

they were not proper hoplite set-piece battles, but underhand, hit-and-run affairs:

These actions [...] were not pitched battles, nor were the combatants drawn up in open or in regular formation: the Thebans gained their successes by making well-judged attacks and by adopting flexible tactics, according to which they might retire and break off the action, or pursue and come to close quarters with the enemy. (*Pelop.* 15.5)

The Boiotians might have won at Naryx, seized Herakleia, and put a Spartan garrison there to death; Medios the Lord of Larissa might have recaptured Pharsalos – the catalyst for recalling Agesilaos from Asia. Yet, even before his return, the Spartans had won an almost ‘tearless’ battle at Nemea. Peisandros and the Spartan fleet had been crushed by Konon at Knidos – but the Spartans still managed to win at Koroneia. Psychologically, it is highly unlikely that Sparta would have perceived the procession of incremental losses and ‘inconclusive’ victories which modern commentators construct (we will return to this argument later) – after all, even the ultimately victorious Peloponnesian War had involved many defeats. This is not to say that these incidents were not important – or that they did not in fact indicate such a decline. However, they probably would not have been *seen* as ominous milestones on the slippery downward slope, as hindsight has painted them. Straws in the wind they may have been, but human history suggests that we are generally unlikely to take much notice of such straws until an entire bale of them is whirling around our ears.

Indeed, it could be argued that the Spartans did in fact have particular reason to be seduced into such complacency, not due so much to lack of foresight, but rather because they simply possessed no knowledge of a historical precedent which would have easily allowed them to envisage the possibility of total defeat, especially since (to use Finley’s phrase), they were ‘massively buttressed, psychologically and institutionally’.⁵⁵ They, and all the rest of the Greek world, perceived Spartan martial courage as the best and the most firmly inculcated, from birth to death.⁵⁶ Sparta was ‘the most powerful and most famous state in Greece’ (Xen. *L.P.* 1.1), and the Spartans themselves were ‘leaders among leaders’ (Xen. *Ages.* 1.3), ‘commanders over commanders’ (ἄρχοντες ἀρχόντων),⁵⁷ due to their obedience to the harsh regime laid down by the mythical Lykourgos.⁵⁸

As Hooker and Powell have shown, in their works on Spartan propaganda and use of the visual respectively,⁵⁹ the Spartans were alive to the importance of propagating such influential ideas widely: Sparta had to be perceived by other *poleis* as the leading Dorian city, entitled by right to hegemony of the Peloponnese; a city where (to quote Hooker) ‘stable government prevailed in surroundings of selflessness and austerity...and

where nicely-balanced institutions permitted the despatch of public business in a mature and deliberate manner'. Most importantly, she had to be seen as the only *polis* where military prowess reigned supreme, for her citizens devoted much of their time and energy to training as effective hoplites, so that their regimen and the obedience which it inculcated assured them of victory in war.⁶⁰

However, it has also been noted that 'the Spartan image was of propagandistic value even to the Spartans themselves'.⁶¹ As Powell has remarked, commenting on Sparta's unusual harmony between values and self-image:

As Aristotle suggests, Spartan ideals mainly concerned military prowess. And in that sphere, while Greeks were thought (by themselves) to be superior to non-Greeks, [...] Spartans seemed superior to other Greeks. Thus the Spartans could believe that they were the best in the world at the thing they most respected.⁶²

I would take this idea further, and suggest that this may have led to a peculiar Spartan *susceptibility* to believe in the self-image which the *polis* and its constitution propagated, so that the Spartans were, in a way, deceived by their own mirage. This would in part explain why Spartan confidence before a military disaster often seems directly proportional to the psychological catastrophe engendered by the defeat afterwards – as soon as they had been beaten, was the vice-like psychological hold of the Spartan mirage loosened? This also held true of its effect on Sparta's allies – one might compare the Spartan and allied reactions after Sphakteria (Thuc. 4.40–41; 4.55), which were only cancelled out by the Spartan victory at Mantinea; or the widespread (although far from complete or immediate) allied defection after Leuktra (Xen. *Hell.* 7.2.2).⁶³

This idea is borne out by Ollier's analysis (in *Le mirage spartiate*, 1933) of 'L'idéalisation à Sparte même'.⁶⁴ He argued that the Spartans idealised their city more unanimously, continuously, and intensely than any other *polis*.⁶⁵ This was facilitated by the Spartans' constant self-representation as the best of soldiers in a state of soldiers, always conversing on military topics, dilating on how great and glorious their army was (while denigrating the forces of their inferior enemies), and gathering specifically to hear tales of their valorous exploits (such as Thermopylai?) recounted during their soirées at the *συσσίτια* (communal messes).⁶⁶ Thus they would become increasingly conscious of their own difference relative to other *poleis*, and learning of others' *Schwärmerei* – one might cite the spate of lost laconising literature which lauded Sparta's institutions as particularly conducive to victory and conquest – might also stimulate their pride and their striving to be yet worthier of their own *polis*.⁶⁷

Now, if we may draw from this evidence the conclusion that every great Spartan victory went down in the Spartans' store of valorous deeds, to be received initially, perhaps, as unsurprising, but later to be relived and much talked-over, perhaps even becoming part of a tradition of oral history, this would also help to explain why the Spartans may have developed a tendency to look down upon their enemies – particularly given that Spartiates participated in such discussions from boyhood (cf. Xen. *L.P.* 5.5; Plut. *Ljk.* 12.4). If you have always, as man and boy, been told that you are the best, militarily, and that your life is preoccupied with training to be the best, then the likelihood is that you will believe it.⁶⁸ We can imagine what might have happened in the *σοφίστιον* if a boy had said that he thought Leonidas' heroic death was actually folly, as was a fashionable view among modern scholars for a time. A painful bite on the thumb might have ensured political correctness for the future (Plut. *Ljk.* 18.2–3).

This might also explain Sparta's utter *aporia* on the few occasions when her forces were defeated beyond doubt (Sphakteria, Lechaion, Leuktra) – not caused by straightforward fear, perhaps, so much as the shock of the utterly unexpected. The Spartans simply had no psychological model to enable them to cope with the sudden shattering of the mirage which they, like the rest of Greece, had believed inviolable. A paradigm for such a psychological reaction can readily be found in German reactions to the death of Hitler and the collapse of the Third Reich.⁶⁹

Conclusions

In general, lack of precedent may have had a large part to play in Sparta's inability to predict her own downfall. We may concur here with the reasoning put forward by Brunt in his article on 'Spartan policy and strategy in the Archidamian War', which warns explicitly against the dangers of hindsight, and constructs an explanation of Spartan conservative strategy at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War based on the premise that 'in making plans for a new war, the Spartans would naturally have been guided by past experience.'⁷⁰ Compare also Powell's observation, that 'faced with a shortage of analogues from which to make predictions, it may be a general human failing to place too much confidence in the one or two available models, at the expense of a needed degree of agnosticism.'⁷¹

I would argue that lack of previous experience could account to a large degree for Sparta's seeming unawareness of her imminent demise as 'top *polis*'. After all, she 'had not suffered a major defeat in pitched battle since Hysiai (in c. 669), so precedents were hard to come by'.⁷² She was also exercising imperial power of a kind which Spartans had neither dreamt of nor had to deal with for several centuries –

that is, one which dealt with friends and foes by subjection rather than affiliation.⁷³

De Romilly, in her book *The Rise and Fall of States According to Greek Authors*, though it is mainly concerned with one state – Athens – did paint a brief picture of Sparta before 404, as a *polis* which commanded its Peloponnesian League allies in a benignly egalitarian fashion:

Sparta had no sea power, no treasury. She had command over cities that had an equal right in all decisions and didn't hate her. Once her league in the Peloponnese was organised, she didn't attempt any new conquest for more than a century; she wasn't, therefore, an object of fear... *The lesson could then have been to follow her example – had she not disregarded it herself.* However, at the end of the Peloponnesian War... she immediately changed her style once she was victorious. She turned into a domineering nation and was soon both feared and hated – till she finally collapsed in her turn.⁷⁴

Yet the Spartans themselves, without the benefit of de Romilly's hindsight, might merely have thought, 'Well, it'll be all right; our subjects can't really hate us – after all, haven't we liberated them from Athens, the true aggressor?' The Spartans could even have begun to believe their own polemic of panhellenist liberation. That aside, why would Sparta have expected the Thebans to be successful in their attempts to muster resistance against her,⁷⁵ when no attempts to topple Spartan dominance had *ever* been successful in the past?

Here I would like to draw a brief analogy, based on the end of a much more modern empire.⁷⁶ It would have seemed unthinkable to those present at George V's magnificent coronation Durbar in 1911, which proved afterwards to be the true apogee of the British empire, that only twelve months later, an anti-British activist would attempt to assassinate the Viceroy. This was an outrage which, with hindsight, can be seen as opening the campaign of increasingly violent civil disobedience which led inexorably to Indian independence. Even when the Prince of Wales (later Edward VIII) toured India in 1921–22, when this insubordination had increased to the point where his itinerary had to be altered to avoid areas where neither a friendly reception nor even his personal safety could be guaranteed, the situation was still thought to be fairly well under control. Similarly, British newspapers refused to believe that Gandhi – 'that little brown man in the loincloth' – could possibly pose a serious threat to British hegemony.

By the time of George VI's accession, however, the situation in India had deteriorated to the point where – to the King's outrage – the Durbar planned for 1938 had to be indefinitely postponed, on account both of political inexpedience and serious physical risk. His Queen, however, believed that if it had only been allowed to take place, her charm and

popularity could have turned the tide. The fact that the empire was crumbling from within was resolutely ignored until the last possible moment.

This sentiment of security may have existed at least as deeply in hegemonic Sparta as the British Raj, given that Sparta had far less historical knowledge of the rise and fall of empires to draw on. Just as the grand gathering of old India hands, rejoicing in the inauguration of Delhi as the new British imperial capital in 1931, would have thought a messenger from the future mad if he had told them that, only seventeen years later, British rule in India would be a thing of the past, I imagine that a Spartan at the turn of the fourth century would have reacted with similar incredulity, if told that, thirty years later, Spartan hegemony would be lost for good, and that the Spartan king Agesilaos would end his life as a disillusioned and ill-used mercenary commander in the pay of a weak Egyptian monarch.

To sum up: led astray by teleological narrative, we perhaps do not place a high enough value on the power of precedent. The Spartans were conservative. If all had been well in the Lykourgan past, then conceivably, they might have expected little to change for the future. Were the supposed 400 years of Sparta's internal stability,⁷⁷ inculcated by the Spartan legend and accepted even by Thucydides, not more than sufficient to guarantee their peace of mind?

Notes

¹ For a recent example of this tendency, see Pownall 2004. The following quotation, taken from her chapter on Xenophon (p. 110), is telling: 'With Xenophon [...] history becomes primarily moral and paradigmatic... [He] is more interested in the moral lessons to be gained from historical events than in preserving an accurate record of the past.' Although one must surely be sensitive to the (widely-acknowledged) fact that Xenophon was historiographically interested in moral issues, I would be loth to suggest that the content of the *Hellenica* is so completely imbued with didactic preoccupations that it has little or no value for determining the course of events. Otherwise, the work would have to be recategorised as a series of parables, rather than as a history in any meaningful sense.

² To paraphrase Cartledge 1987, 349.

³ cf. Finley 1975, 165.

⁴ On this point, see Christopher Pelling's chapter in this volume.

⁵ As can be seen most particularly in the case of the Sphakteria debacle (Thuc. 4.1–41).

⁶ Private communication, 20/09/2011.

⁷ cf. Cawkwell 1983.

⁸ Cartledge 1987, 409; cf. also p. 355.

⁹ Is it really impossible for a ruling class, disproportionately small in comparison to its conquered empire, to establish an enduring dominion, given, for example, the success of the British in establishing long-standing rule in India (see further below)?

If the scope of this article had allowed, I would have taken a similar approach to analysis of other social problems which are now seen as key to Sparta's downfall (such as the unequal distribution of wealth and problems of land tenure). Although these doubtless had a very great impact, would the Spartans really have perceived their *polis* to have been in such dire straits in terms of demography, economics and status-anxiety, as perhaps she truly was?

¹⁰ Powell 2001, 224. Cf. de Romilly 1977, particularly pp. 5, 19, and 60.

¹¹ Xen. *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* 15 – cf. Dillery 1995, 179; Powell 2001, 224.

¹² See Diod. Sic. 14.1–2; 15.1.

¹³ Cartledge 1987, 347.

¹⁴ Cartledge 1987, 396.

¹⁵ Michell 1964, 333–4.

¹⁶ Michell 1964, 334–5.

¹⁷ Hodkinson 1989, 109–110.

¹⁸ Hodkinson 1989, 110.

¹⁹ Hamilton 1979, 299–325.

²⁰ Hamilton 1991, 183–214.

²¹ Hamilton 1979, 18. Emphasis mine.

²² Hamilton 1991, 151–2. Emphasis mine. For further use of 'fateful' to describe Sparta's actions and decisions, cf. pp. 183, 204; see also Hamilton 1979, 42.

²³ Hamilton 1991, 84–5. For a further example, see p. 165.

²⁴ Hamilton 1991, 79. Emphasis mine. Cf. his concluding comment on p. 85: 'It is ironic that this event occurred at the very beginning of Agesilaus' long reign, for no amount of success, or even brilliance, in the military or political sphere would save Sparta so long as its socioeconomic problems cried out in vain for attention.'

²⁵ Hamilton 1991, 213. In the book's final paragraph (p. 257), Hamilton introduces further dissonance, stating that Sparta's decline did not follow so much from her defeat at Leuktra, as from her previous foreign policy.

²⁶ For an anthology of modern 'Spartans were fools' references, see Powell 2001, 97 and nn. there.

²⁷ cf. e.g. *Hell.* 6.4.3: τὸ δαιμόνιον ἦγεν (the deity was leading them on); 6.4.8.

²⁸ However, Alexander Meeus kindly informs me that Diodorus has a habit of describing a great many events as happening παραδόξως; see also Plut. *Ages.* 29.1: 'On this occasion the Spartans had met with an unexpected defeat, while the Thebans, against all expectation (παρὰ δόξαν), had won a victory such as had never been seen in all the wars between Greek peoples...'

²⁹ Xenophon's narrative does in fact confirm this sentiment when he portrays the Spartans as dismissing as nonsense the moderate suggestions of Prothoos in the Spartan Assembly, and as urging Kleombrotos to march to battle with the Thebans if the latter did not give the cities of Boiotia their independence (*Hell.* 6.4.2–3). They would not, after all, have been likely to send Kleombrotos and his citizen army if they had expected them to die.

³⁰ Cartledge 1987, 382.

³¹ Diod. Sic. 15.53; cf. Plut. *Pelop.* 20.

³² cf. Cartledge 1987, 223 – he states that the only major Spartan military failures before Leuktra were Hysiai in the seventh century, Sphakteria in 425 BC, and Lechaion.

³³ See in particular Cawkwell 1983.

³⁴ Munn 1997, 83.

³⁵ For more on this, see especially Cawkwell 1976, 82 ff.

³⁶ cf. Diod. Sic. 15.5.

³⁷ One could also cite the Spartans' response to the ambassadors from Akanthos who were urging them to campaign against Olynthos and its newly-founded Thracian League in 383/382. The Spartans were evidently confident of success, for they needed little persuading right from the start (*Hell.* 5.2.20). Cartledge believes that this was because the campaign presented a golden opportunity for implementing Agesilaos' highly-imperialist *Nordpolitik* (1987, 268–70).

³⁸ cf. also Tuplin 1993, 72.

³⁹ Though even kings are not immune – take the case of Pausanias at Diodorus Siculus 14.17 (or, more broadly, the behaviour on certain occasions of Agesilaos himself, e.g. Plut. *Ages.* 18, 28).

⁴⁰ An interesting parallel here could be Mnasippos' arrogant behaviour on Kerkyra, particularly towards his mercenaries, which led to his utter defeat (*Hell.* 6.2.5–6, 15–23). For more on Spartan commanders' arrogance abroad, see Hornblower 2000.

⁴¹ e.g. *Hell.* 3.5.10–13; 6.3.7–9; 7.1.24, 44; Diod. Sic. 14.82.2; 15.1.3; 15.19.4; 15.20.2; Plut. *Pelop.* 6.

⁴² Cartledge 1987, 349.

⁴³ On this, see in particular Hamilton 1970. The startling exception is the treatment of Athens in 403.

⁴⁴ Hamilton 1979, 66.

⁴⁵ Smith 1953/4, 275.

⁴⁶ Sparta's reduction of Elis (*Hell.* 3.2.21–31, Diod. Sic. 14.17.4–12) would also be a case in point.

⁴⁷ Hamilton 1979, 100.

⁴⁸ H. D. Westlake (1986, 408) took a similar view. Cf. also Plut. *Ages.* 9.

⁴⁹ e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 3.1.16–28; 3.2.1–2, 18–20 (successes of Derkyllidas); 3.4.5–29 (successes of Agesilaos, particularly against Tissaphernes); 3.5.1 (Tithraustes unable to cope with the situation); 4.1.29–38 (Agesilaos' dealings with Pharnabazos); cf. also Plut. *Ages.* 9–15, Diod. Sic. 14.80.

⁵⁰ For evidence of Sparta's position as leading state in Greece see e.g. Hdt. 1.69; 1.82; 5.49; Thuc. 1.10.

⁵¹ For another example, see Diod. Sic. 13.70. If we can believe that the words ascribed to the Spartan ambassador Endios by Diodorus Siculus (13.52.3–8) during peace negotiations with Athens in 410 were more or less 'as he delivered them' (τοὺς ὡθέντας λόγους), then his essential premise, that the Spartans did not count naval defeat as a truly tangible failure which impugned their hoplite honour, is both plausible and cogent. He states that 'even if we meet defeat in our actions at sea, we will still maintain without dispute the mastery on land – for a Spartan foot-soldier does not even know what flight means – but you, if you are driven from the sea, contend, not for the supremacy on land, but for survival.' Naval defeats might have been considered in the same way, perhaps, as arrows were by the Spartan soldier who surrendered on Sphakteria (Thuc. 4.40.2); to be vanquished by such feminine 'spindles' could be dismissed as negligible. If fighting at sea were not real fighting, then defeats at sea need not have been seen as representing Spartan weakness and imminent decline, or have engendered a concomitant loss of confidence. (For more on the Spartan hoplite code, see Cartledge 2001 and Lendon 1997).

⁵² cf. Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.1–3; 5.3.27; Diod. Sic. 15.21–23.

⁵³ Elis – *Hell.* 3.2.27, Diod. Sic. 14.17.4–12; Phleious – *Hell.* 5.2.9.

⁵⁴ G. Cawkwell, in Rex Warner's Penguin translation of the *Hellenica* (*A History of My Times*, London 1979, p. 301).

⁵⁵ Finley 1975, 165.

⁵⁶ For examples of other Greeks believing that Sparta was almost impossible to defeat, cf. *Hell.* 4.2.12; 7.1.8–11 (even *after* Leuktra!); *Hell. Oxy.* 18.2. Or, as Elizabeth Rawson has put it in a passage on Sparta's image in Attic comedy: 'no one made fun of the Lacedaemonian soldier' (1969, 26). Compare the universal consternation after other *poleis* discovered that, as far as Spartan invincibility went, it wasn't (always) necessarily so – for example after the Sphakteria disaster (Thuc. 4.32ff; 4.40). The wish which Herodotus ascribed to Leonidas at Thermopylai, to 'lay up for the Spartans a treasure of fame which no other city could share' (Hdt. 7.220), had certainly been realised.

⁵⁷ Thuc. 5.66.4.

⁵⁸ If we believe that contemporary Spartans would have identified with Xenophon's point of view in these passages, and that Xenophon only added the censorious (?) final chapter to the *Lakedaimoniōn Politeia* as an afterthought, then this implies that Xenophon too (and by extension the Lakedaimonians among whom he dwelt) would have expected Sparta to continue to excel just as she had been doing – with disillusionment occurring only after the fact, when Sparta began actively to fall short of her own propaganda.

⁵⁹ Both articles can be found in Powell 1989.

⁶⁰ Hooker 1989, 129–30.

⁶¹ Debnar 2001, 28.

⁶² Powell 2001, 100.

⁶³ cf. Powell 2001, 159.

⁶⁴ Ollier 1933, 89–118. Hamilton also presents an image of a Sparta seduced by her own myths in his article 'The Ideology of Spartan Conservatism' (1996).

⁶⁵ Ollier 1933, 89.

⁶⁶ Plut. *Lyk.* 12; Ollier 1933, 108.

⁶⁷ On the lost laconising literature, see Rawson 1969, 33. On pride in Sparta and striving to be worthy of her, see Ollier 1933, pp. 110, 114.

⁶⁸ One need only consider twentieth-century German history to know that this is eminently possible; such a strategy worked all too well with pupils of elite schools during the Third Reich, even though they had only been trained in this manner for between three and seven years (see further n. 69 below).

⁶⁹ This observation is particularly relevant in the case of the ex-Nazi-elite-school pupils with whom I have corresponded in the course of my doctoral research, since they, like the Spartans, had been prepared singularly to fight for the fatherland, and been taught that their forces were invincible (the crowning irony is that the Spartans themselves had in some cases been presented as models for emulation and identification in order to inculcate this). For more on this, see Roche 2012 and 2013.

⁷⁰ Brunt 1993, 94; cf. also p. 104.

⁷¹ Powell 2001, 148.

⁷² Cartledge 1987, 412.

⁷³ See Parke 1930, 37.

⁷⁴ de Romilly 1977, 63. Emphasis mine.

⁷⁵ cf. e.g. *Hell. Oxy.* 7.2.

⁷⁶ I am deeply indebted to Elizabeth Roche for pointing out this parallel, and for providing me with the relevant literature.

⁷⁷ Thuc. 1.18.1.

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CONFUSING AIM AND RESULT? HINDSIGHT AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF ALEXANDER THE GREAT'S EMPIRE*

Alexander Meens

The historian (...) has to maintain an indeterministic point of view towards his subject. He constantly engages with a point in the past when the knowable factors still seemed to allow for different outcomes. When he speaks of Salamis, a Persian victory is still possible, when he speaks of the coup of Brumaire, it is still pending whether Bonaparte will not be scornfully turned away. Only by constantly bearing in mind that the possibilities are unlimited can he do justice to the complexity of life. (J. Huizinga)¹

The disintegration of Alexander the Great's empire seems to have been definitively completed when in 276 BC Antigonos Gonatas established himself as king of Macedon. All three of the main Hellenistic kingdoms had now been formed, some 48 years after Alexander had died without leaving a Successor, 48 years of civil war.² In the long run, its falling apart is the single most important fact about Alexander's empire after the death of the conqueror. Focus on this fact has led scholars to believe that the break-up was not only inevitable,³ but even sought after by many of the protagonists: the *communis opinio* of modern scholarship is that only some of the Diadochoi wanted to maintain the empire's unity, while most of them started carving out kingdoms for themselves from early on without showing any interest in ruling over all of Alexander's territories, supposedly being content from the outset – or soon thereafter – with the area they ended up with.⁴ Kassandros died in 297 as king in Macedonia and Greece, and he is thought not to have had any ambitions to control a larger territory.⁵ Ptolemy passed away in 283/2 holding sway in Egypt, the adjacent areas, the Aegean islands, Cyprus, and parts of Asia Minor, but he is thought to have been interested only in the dominion of Egypt.⁶ In 281 Lysimachos fell in a battle which might have given him power over a much larger part of Asia than he already owned, but most scholars claim that he

only cared about Europe and Asia Minor.⁷ Seleukos' subsequent attempt to add Macedon to his Asian realm is usually interpreted as seizing the opportunity offered by the moment, rather than fulfilling a long-standing ambition.⁸ The aim of becoming Alexander's sole Successor is typically attributed only to Perdikkas and the Antigonids, whose actions most clearly displayed this goal.⁹ Thus, most scholars hold that Alexander's empire could not but fall apart because the unitarists were no match for the more numerous separatist forces. It has even been contended that one can only understand the era of the Diadochoi by looking at it from the perspective of this opposition between unitarists and separatists,¹⁰ but I shall try to argue that a different perspective seems to fit the evidence better.

In her monograph about Lysimachos, Lund (1992, 51–52) already suggested that the presumed dichotomy between unitarists and separatists is based mostly on hindsight. Nonetheless, the traditional view has been so firmly established that Lund too was prepared to admit that Ptolemy and Kassandros may well have been separatists. Her critical remarks have, furthermore, not been heeded by many scholars – let alone approved. There has hardly been approval even for Gruen's more careful conclusion in his article 'The Coronation of the Diadochoi' (1985), arguing that there was no difference between the territorial ambitions of the Diadochoi: while, in his view, none of them particularly coveted the whole empire, they all wanted as much as possible.

The aim of this analysis is to try and understand the disintegration process from the point of view of the protagonists, men who may first of all have considered themselves victims of this process rather than its catalysts. We must not simply equate the ambitions of the Successors to their achievements, 'nor should their every action be treated as if it conspired to determine the outcome', to borrow Gruen's phrase about the last generation of the Roman republic (1974, 2). On the other hand, Finley (1985, 3) was definitely right to note that 'hindsight is an essential tool of the historian, not a vulgar joke at his expense': the problem indeed is not so much hindsight itself, which adds perspective, but its apparent capacity to induce teleological reasoning and the historian's incapacity to resist this.¹¹ Teleological arguments clearly stand in the way of a proper understanding of the period; especially when trying to reconstruct the ambitions and expectations of historical actors it is essential to consider the events from their perspective – revealed by their propaganda – rather than from hindsight.¹² I would suggest that rather than a conflict between unitarian and centrifugal powers, the dissolution of Alexander's empire was the result of a war between too many equal contenders for a single throne.¹³

While for us the Hellenistic world is inextricably associated with the three main Hellenistic kingdoms, it must be stressed that this geopolitical situation was unknown to everyone when Alexander died on June 11, 323. Furthermore, none of those living through the period are likely to have waxed lyrical about ‘the birth (...) of the “modern” conception of territorial states with no claims to universality which seek to co-exist, as far as their interests allow, in a system of unstable equilibrium’, as at least one modern scholar did; indeed he almost expressed relief when – in his view – the struggle for universal dominion was over and the work of political and cultural development could start unhindered.¹⁴ The historian of the early Hellenistic period, then, must start his or her investigation on the eleventh of June 323 as if at least three things were equally possible: the empire’s survival intact under the Argead dynasty after a period of regency; unity under the sway of one of the generals usurping power; or the empire’s dismemberment.

1. The view of the sources

The picture presented by the ancient authors is very different from the modern scholarly consensus. The most explicit one is the famous passage in Diodorus (20.37.4) on the number of marriage proposals Alexander’s sister Kleopatra received:

διὰ τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν οὖν τοῦ γένους οἱ περὶ Κάσανδρον καὶ Λυσίμαχον, ἔτι δὲ Ἀντίγονον καὶ Πτολεμαῖον καὶ καθόλου πάντες οἱ μετὰ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου τελευτὴν ἀξιολογώτατοι τῶν ἡγεμόνων ταύτην ἐμνήστευον· ἕκαστος γὰρ τοῦτω τῷ γάμῳ συνακολουθήσειν Μακεδόνας ἐλπίζων ἀντεῖχετο τῆς βασιλικῆς οἰκίας, ὥς τὴν τῶν ὅλων ἀρχὴν περιστήσῃ εἰς ἑαυτόν.

Because of the distinction of her descent Cassander and Lysimachus, as well as Antigonos and Ptolemy and in general all the leaders who were most important after Alexander’s death, sought her hand; for each of them, hoping that the Macedonians would follow the lead of this marriage, was seeking alliance with the royal house in order thus to gain power over the entire realm for himself.¹⁵ (trans. R. M. Geer, adapted)

Cornelius Nepos, in his biography of Eumenes (2.3–4), makes a similar claim when describing Perdikkas’ ambitions:

Cogitabat enim (...) omnium partis corripere atque complecti. Neque vero hoc ille solus fecit, sed ceteri quoque omnes qui Alexandri fuerant amici.

[F]or it was his design (...) to seize the shares of all the others and unite them. But he was not the only one who had this design, for it was entertained by all the rest who had been friends of Alexander. (trans. J. C. Rolfe)

After his description of the satrapy distribution following Alexander's death, Curtius (10.10.6–8) comments:

Et quidem suas quisque opes divisis imperii partibus ipsi fundaverant, si umquam adversus inmodicas cupiditates terminus staret: quippe paulo ante regis ministri specie imperii alieni procurandi singuli ingentia invaserant regna sublati certaminum causis, cum et omnes eiusdem gentis essent et a ceteris sui quisque imperii regione discreti. Sed difficile erat eo contentos esse, quod obtulerat occasio: quippe sordent prima quaeque, cum maiora sperantur. Itaque omnibus exoptatius videbatur augere regna, quam fuisset accipere.

In fact, after the division of the empire, it seems they would have all individually established their own dominions – if a boundary could ever stand in the way of unbridled ambition. For men who recently had been subjects of the king had individually seized control of huge kingdoms, ostensibly as administrators of an empire belonging to another, and any pretext for conflict was removed since they all belonged to the same race and were geographically separated from each other by the boundaries of their several jurisdictions. But it was difficult to remain satisfied with what the opportunity of the moment had brought them: initial possessions are disdained when there is hope of greater things. So they all thought that expanding their kingdoms was an easier matter than taking possession of them had been in the first place. (trans. J. C. Yardley)

In his life of Pyrrhos, Plutarch (*Pyrrh.* 12.2–3) likewise comments on the unbridled ambition of the Diadochoi:

οἷς γὰρ οὐ πέλαγος, οὐκ ὄρος, οὐκ ἀοίκητος ἐρημία πέρας ἐστὶ πλεονεξίας, οὐδ' οἱ διαιροῦντες Εὐρώπην καὶ Ἀσίαν τέρμονες ὀρίζουσι τὰς ἐπιθυμίας, πῶς ἂν ἀπτόμενοι καὶ ψαύοντες ἀλλήλων ἀτρεμοῖεν, ἐν τοῖς παροῦσι μὴ ἀδικοῦντες, οὐκ ἔστιν εἰπεῖν· ἀλλὰ πολέμοισι μὲν αἰεὶ, τὸ ἐπιβουλεύειν καὶ φθονεῖν ἔμφυτον ἔχοντες, δυεῖν δ' ὀνομάτων ὥσπερ νομισμάτων, πολέμου καὶ εἰρήνης, τῷ παρατυχόντι χρῶνται πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον, οὐ πρὸς τὸ δίκαιον·

For how men to whose rapacity neither sea nor mountain nor uninhabitable desert sets a limit, men to whose inordinate desires the boundaries which separate Europe and Asia put no stop, can remain content with what they have and do one another no wrong when they are in close touch, it is impossible to say. Nay, they are perpetually at war, because plots and jealousies are parts of their nature, and they treat the two words, war and peace, like current coins, using whichever happens to be for their advantage, regardless of justice. (trans. B. Perrin)

For these ancient authors there clearly was no limit to the ambitions of the Successors, and Diodorus and Nepos especially assert that they all coveted the entire realm. Apart from these texts, there are several passages in Diodorus, Plutarch and an anonymous historical fragment on papyrus which attribute the aim of obtaining Alexander's entire legacy to individual

Successors, namely Perdikkas (Diod. 18.23.3), Antigonos and his son Demetrios (*P. Köln* VI 247, col. 1, l. 18–27; Diod. 18.50.2, 18.54.4, 19.56.2, 20.51.1; cf. Diod. 20.110.5; Plb. 5.102.1; Plut. *Demetr.* 15.4 and 43.2),¹⁶ Kassandros (Diod. 18.49.2; cf. 19.69.1 and 20.110.5) and perhaps Ptolemy (Diod. 19.93.5, 20.51.1; cf. Plut. *Demetr.*, 15.4).¹⁷ Except for – probably – the unknown author of the Cologne papyrus (*P. Köln* VI 247), all of these authors wrote at least 250 years after the actual facts, but their judgement may well be based on, if not copied from, contemporary sources. Even if both contemporary and later authors may be inspired by commonplaces about warlords with an insatiable thirst for power, it is important to note that there is no mention of any separatist ambitions. Or is there?

Actually, Pausanias does seem to present Ptolemy as a separatist, and his testimony has often been used as evidence in favour of the traditional view about the disintegration of Alexander's empire. What is most interesting for the present enquiry is, that Pausanias' analysis can be shown to be the earliest preserved example of an interpretation of events after Alexander that has been misled by hindsight. Pausanias (1.6.2–3) writes about Ptolemy:

Τελευτήσαντος δὲ Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῖς ἐς Ἀριδαῖον τὸν Φιλίππου τὴν πᾶσαν ἄγουσιν ἀρχὴν ἀντιστὰς αὐτὸς μάλιστα ἐγένετο ἐς τὰς βασιλείας αἴτιος τὰ ἔθνη νεμηθῆναι. Αὐτὸς δὲ ἐς Αἴγυπτον διαβάς (...)

After the death of Alexander, by withstanding those who would have conferred all his empire upon Arrhidaeus, the son of Philip, he became chiefly responsible for the division of the various nations into the kingdoms. He crossed over to Egypt in person (...). (trans. W. H. S. Jones)

The context for this mention of Ptolemy's role in the break-up of Alexander's empire has all too often been neglected. It seems clear to me that Pausanias has interpreted his source's mention of the satrapy distribution of Babylon through hindsight as the main cause of the eventual disbanding of the empire. This is indicated first of all by the chronological information the statement contains: the issue of the succession had not yet been definitively settled and Ptolemy had yet to leave for Egypt. The combination of both elements strongly suggests that we are facing the events leading up to the Babylon settlement immediately after Alexander's death.

Moreover, Appian's description of the satrapy distribution contains a striking echo: ἐς σατραπείας ἐνείμαντο τὰ ἔθνη (*Syr.* 52). The peculiar wording wrongly suggests that the satrapies were only established at the time of the Babylon settlement, and is clearly the result of a common source.¹⁸ Pausanias' substituting σατραπείαι with βασιλείαι is a common mistake in our sources on the Successors, and Pausanias also makes it a few lines later when writing that Perdikkas wanted to remove Ptolemy from ἡ ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ

βασιλεία in his attack on Egypt in 320, while in fact Ptolemy was no more than a satrap at the time. Thus, the conclusion that Pausanias has garbled his source's description of the satrapy distribution seems to me unavoidable. All that the passage can teach us, then, is that Ptolemy took a leading role in advocating a new distribution of the satrapies. What is striking, however, is that for Pausanias, as for so many modern scholars, the distribution of provincial commands only weeks after Alexander's death already started an irreversible process of disintegration. Such an interpretation is not convincing, however, as the satrapies were there already and had to be governed anyway: the appointment of new governors did not preclude any scenario in which the empire would survive intact.

2. Some general problems

Before proceeding with a chronologically organized analysis of the break-up of Alexander's empire it may be useful to start with some general points which concern both sides of the hindsight medal: avoiding teleological arguments as well as making full use of the benefit of hindsight. Throughout this analysis it is important to bear in mind that resistance to the central government does not necessarily imply the aim of disbanding the state. Regardless of the extent of power they were aiming at, those who did not belong to the central government but who wanted to obtain power had no other choice but to establish a territorial power base independent of the central government. This power base could then either secede from the state or be used as a base of operation from which to seize power over the entire empire. Whatever ambition one might have, a territorial power base was an absolute prerequisite. For Ptolemy, Kassandros, Seleukos and Lysimachos the establishment and defence of a territorial power base, usually a relatively limited area (Egypt, Macedon and Greece, Thrace), clearly was an absolute priority. That most of them, especially Kassandros and Ptolemy, ended up with a kingdom that was (or has been considered) mainly limited to their original power base may suggest that it was all they wanted, but this is not necessarily so; and we should not forget that Ptolemy's empire encompassed a great deal more than just Egypt (*cf. infra* n. 23). Thus, there may have been two different strategies rather than two different aims. While men such as Perdikkas and Antigonos considered it preferable to extend their influence over as large a territory as possible as soon as possible, others may have deemed it better to start from a solid basis and slowly work from there in order finally to achieve universal dominion by awaiting suitable opportunities. Both Perdikkas and Antigonos were striving towards their goal much more directly and more conspicuously, but their strategy may reflect a difference in character rather

than in ambition, as more careful strategies could have exactly the same goal as bolder ones.

The effects of hindsight are enhanced by the tunnel vision with which we look at events through the limited portion of source material that has been preserved. The literary sources do tell us more about the universalist aims of Antigonos than of any other Successor, but this need not mean he was the only one to entertain such ambitions or even the most determined one. In general the preserved ancient accounts simply pay more attention to Eumenes and the Antigonids than to the others.¹⁹

Furthermore, one should not overrate the meaning of alliances: scholars often consider the bi- and multi-lateral agreements of the Diadochoi as an expression of mutual recognition of sovereignty.²⁰ Such a constitutional approach fails to take into account the political expediency of the Successors which is so clear from hindsight: Wheatley (1998, 20) has aptly described the period as ‘characterised by an ever-shifting pattern of alliances, treaties and betrayals’ (see also Plut. *Pyrrh.* 12.2–3; cf. Plb. 2.47.5). To avoid isolation, the Diadochoi often entered into an alliance with others, but those treaties were broken as easily as they had been concluded. They were intended to respond to the needs of the moment and certainly had no constitutional significance, nor do they in themselves reveal anything about the long-term ambitions of the allied parties. This can easily be illustrated by the following example. In 319 Kassandros revolted against the regent Polyperchon. Diodorus (18.49.2) explicitly states that Kassandros’ motive was to acquire ἡ τῶν ὅλων ἡγεμονία, authority over the entire realm. Nonetheless, he immediately concluded an alliance with Ptolemy (Diod. 18.49.3). This does not prove that he acknowledged Ptolemy’s sovereignty over Egypt, but rather that he realized that his current power base was too small to defeat Polyperchon on his own.

Some assume that the ambition to control Alexander’s entire legacy was excessive, and that therefore no one held it (e.g. Billows 1990, 3–4 and *passim*). Furthermore, it is an oft-repeated claim that the empire was simply too large to survive,²¹ although Alexander had merely added Greece and the surrounding Balkan territories to an empire that had been in existence for about 200 years, a comparatively small increase in size (cf. Erskine and Llewellyn-Jones 2011a, xv). As soon as the perspective of hindsight is necessarily abandoned, as in Toynbee’s counterfactual essay ‘If Alexander the Great had Lived on’, there seems to be no problem with imagining the empire’s survival even on a much wider scale.²² Indeed, without hindsight it must have been possible that the territories acquired by a single individual could be kept together by another individual, at least for a certain period of time. Thus, there is no reason why it would be absolutely impossible

that some or all of the Successors throughout their careers strove to bring Alexander's entire legacy under their sway.

Certain scholars deem it unlikely that a ruler would pursue the same goal during his entire career (Seibert 1969, 88; Lund 1992, 52), but this is in no way *a priori* impossible. On the other hand, to my mind this does become far less likely if we are asked to believe that someone set out from day one to achieve the simplified summary of what he ended up with. Yet some argue that Ptolemy immediately decided that he would strive to become the ruler of an independent Egypt, forgetting or explaining away (as defensive imperialism) that he actually controlled far wider territories for the most part of his reign and at the time of his death.²³ Obviously this is not to say that the ambitions of at least some of the Successors may not have evolved over time, but we hardly have enough insight into their minds to recover such evolutions. Unless we could be enlightened by changing propaganda, all we can really see is evolution of their power and strategy.²⁴

Indeed, the main source for studying a ruler's ambitions obviously is his propaganda. While most of the propaganda of the Successors does not directly reveal much about the extent of their territorial claims, it does constantly refer to Alexander in a way that may suggest that they all aimed to become his true, and therefore probably only, successor.²⁵ They claimed that Alexander appeared to them in their dreams (Diod. 18.60.4–6, 19.90.4; Plut. *Eum.* 6.5–6, *Demetr.* 29.1, *Pyrrh.* 11.2), his name was used in battle watchwords (Plut. *Eum.* 6.10–11, *Demetr.* 29.1), they met in front of his throne or in what passed as his tent (Curt. 10.6.4; Diod. 18.60.4–61.3, 19.15; Plut. *Eum.* 13.5–8; Nepos *Eum.* 7), sacrifices for Alexander and Philip were held (Diod. 19.15.4, 19.22.1, 3), and they fought for possession of his body (Curt. 10.7.16–19 and see below). Service to the Argeads was stressed (Just. 16.1.12–17; Bosworth 2002, 251), and actions against the Argead house, alleged or real, were used against their perpetrators (Diod. 19.61.3; Just. 16.2.5; Plut., *Dem.* 37.2). The coinage of Philip and Alexander continued to be minted, and new types were even struck in Alexander's name or with his portrait on them.²⁶ Many of the Diadochoi had themselves portrayed or sculpted together with Alexander.²⁷ Ptolemy produced a fake will of Alexander and wrote a history of Alexander's campaigns in which he himself seems to have played a major role (*cf. infra*). Marital connections to the Argead house were eagerly sought after (Meeus 2009b; *cf. infra*).

Even this propaganda, however, is often not taken to mean that the majority of the Diadochoi aimed at becoming Alexander's true successor, most strikingly so by Wirth:

As the justification of their own roles was possible only by referring to Alexander, they were giving a questionable impression by simultaneously destroying his empire. Titles, offices, missions performed in the name of the empire and usurped roles which for several decades continued to refer to Alexander (...), can from the very beginning only have been considered hollow phrases by the public (...) ²⁸

Wirth automatically concludes that we are facing 'hollow phrases', because he presupposes there were separatists among the Diadochoi. There is a contradiction between evidence and scholarly interpretation, but not necessarily between the Successors' propaganda and their policies. Wirth's very point that such hollow phrases would cause the propaganda to make a questionable impression implies that any decent politician should have looked elsewhere for his propaganda if he wanted it to work. Thus, it seems safer to assume that if someone acted as if he was Alexander's true successor, that is exactly what he wanted the world to think, and there is no reason why Alexander's true successor should aspire only to a limited part of his empire. Furthermore, as Strootman (2013) has shown, claims to universality were a crucial aspect of Hellenistic royal ideology from Alexander onwards (cf. below, n. 57).

3. The Babylon conferences

So much for general observations. I shall now study the most relevant episodes from the history of the Diadochoi and their possible interpretations, focusing on the theme of hindsight. Ptolemy will feature quite often, not only because he is traditionally considered the most clear example of a separatist Successor, but also because the evidence to the contrary seems particularly strong. While some have rightly stressed that breaking up the empire was unthinkable for the Macedonians at this moment, ²⁹ to others the separatist tendencies manifested themselves from the very beginning, ³⁰ so that we must start with the tumultuous first meeting to debate the succession on the day after Alexander's death.

The situation was unique: for the first time in the history of the dynasty there was no male candidate within the Argead royal house who could immediately take up the actual rule. ³¹ Arrhidaios, Alexander's half-brother, was mentally deficient, and even if Alexander's pregnant wife Rhoxane were to give birth to a son, a regency would be required for almost two decades. The debates were fierce. While the proposal of Nearchos has been interpreted as an attempt to weaken the empire's unity (Mehl 1986, 25), and that of Ptolemy even as his first step to disband it altogether, ³² both can be more plausibly explained in the context of the power struggle that ensued immediately after Alexander's death. Nearchos proposed to

appoint Alexander's son by Barsine as king rather than to await Rhoxane's delivery to see whether her child would be a boy, as Perdikkas had suggested. Since the Susa mass marriage in 324, Nearchos was Barsine's son-in-law, so he had a vested interest in seeing her promoted to the status of queen mother. However, he found no approval, most likely because everyone would have understood that Nearchos was looking ahead to the position he could acquire thanks to his relationship to the proposed candidate (Curt. 10.6.10–12; Meeus 2008, 47–48).

When Ptolemy suggested appointing no king at all, but rather the installing of a council of Alexander's closest friends to govern the empire, he was probably thinking of 'getting as much as possible out of the actual political situation, and preventing others from getting more' (Mooren 1983, 233): he could have no chance of becoming regent or king, so a position on such a council was the best he could hope for. His proposition clearly envisages a central government of which he himself would be part, and only hindsight could mistakenly suggest that it involves a territorial division.³³

Eventually a compromise was reached that installed a dual kingship: Arrhidaios (now Philip III) and Rhoxane's child, if it proved to be a boy, were to share the throne, and Perdikkas was appointed regent as both kings could not actually rule. According to Will (1984, 26), this 'was clearly no more than an interim solution'. At the time, however, no one knew what the eventual state of affairs would be. Is it really impossible that many or at least some thought that Alexander's son had a chance of reaching adulthood, in which case it simply was a matter of deciding whether or not Philip Arrhidaios then needed to remain his co-king?

4. Perdikkas, Ptolemy and Alexander's burial

The settlement, however, had not satisfied the ambitions of several Macedonian generals. The boldest attempt to get more came from Perdikkas: he seems to have planned to marry Alexander's full sister Kleopatra and to bring Alexander's body to Macedon for burial at Aigai, contrary to the decision taken in 323 to honour the king's wish to be buried at Siwah (Paus. 1.6.3; Meeus 2008, 66–68). Burying the deceased king was always an important symbol of dynastic succession (Meeus 2008, 68 with n. 134), and in so doing Perdikkas would at the very least make his position as regent unchallengeable, especially if he were also to be the husband of the king's sister; probably his plan was even to bid for kingship, as Diodorus (18.23.3 and 25.3) claims. He would be in a position very similar to Philip II who obtained the kingship as regent for his underage nephew Amyntas IV (Anson 2009). That the empire was to remain united after Perdikkas' crossing seems clear from the decoration of Alexander's funeral

cart, for which Perdikkas as regent likely had the final responsibility (Stewart 1993, 218): especially the portrayal of Alexander amidst both Macedonian and Persian guards (Diod. 18.27.1) was meant to express the imperial ideology rather than to please the audience that would witness the arrival of the hearse in Macedon.³⁴

Ptolemy, however, prevented Perdikkas from executing his plan by hijacking the funeral cart in Syria as it was making its way to Macedon. Perdikkas sent out an expedition to regain possession of the dead king, but his men came too late. Ptolemy buried Alexander in Memphis, and later transferred the body to Alexandria (Erskine 2002). The most popular interpretation of Ptolemy's move seems a textbook case of misunderstanding due to hindsight.

The majority of scholars seems to hold that Perdikkas wanted to advertise his ambitions to reign over Alexander's entire empire by bringing the late king to Macedon in his magnificent hearse, while Ptolemy merely wanted to neutralize the symbol of unity.³⁵ That Perdikkas indeed entertained such ambitions is highly likely, but what about Ptolemy? Could he really have given the highly symbolic act of burying the deceased king of the Macedonian empire – which is what Alexander was first of all – a different meaning? Errington (1975, 143) writes:

The result is well-known: (...) the effective neutralisation for immediate political purposes of the value of Alexander the Great's body. Only in the hands of the 'central government' (or of those who aimed to set up or control a 'central government') of the empire was the body a potential political weapon. Once the decentralists Antipater and Ptolemy had defeated Perdikkas Alexander's body was, doubtless to the satisfaction of both, at last buried. (...) The symbolism attaching to the great king's body was now essentially limited to his role within the Ptolemaic kingdom, more particularly to his dual role as founder of the kingdom and of the capital city Alexandria (...).

This statement is highly problematic, even if the latter part actually refers to the later situation when the tomb had been moved to Alexandria. First of all, we have no evidence whatsoever that Ptolemy did indeed consider the body-snatch as an act of separatism. He might well have been one of those aiming eventually to set up or control a central government. Secondly, it is highly anachronistic to talk about the Ptolemaic kingdom when Ptolemy hijacked the body in 321 or even by the time he moved Alexander's tomb to Alexandria: at that time Egypt could not be considered anything other than a satrapy in the Macedonian empire.³⁶ Moreover, it does not seem feasible that, as so many generals were still striving to get hold of Alexander's entire legacy, one of the Successors

could have claimed a special bond with Alexander while only aiming to hold sway over Egypt: such a stance would not have been credible at all.³⁷ As I have already noted above, Wirth (1989, 198) was definitely right to claim that propaganda referring to Alexander would make a questionable impression when it came from the very men who were destroying his empire, so that it seems more likely that Ptolemy by the body-snatch was laying claim to the entire empire.³⁸

Erschine (2002, 172–173) has recently drawn attention to the audience which the satrap of Egypt wanted to address with the body-snatch and similar acts of propaganda: the soldiers who enthusiastically joined Ptolemy after the hijacking (cf. Diod. 18.28.5). With this intended audience the alleged separatist message is even less likely. After all, Macedonians and Greeks apparently were not very enthusiastic about staying in the east at this time as they had shown at the Hyphasis and at Opis and with the revolt of the colonists in the far east of the empire which broke out at the news of Alexander's death.³⁹ Would such men, then, enthusiastically join Ptolemy's cause if they already knew it meant they had to spend the rest of their careers in Egypt and nearby? Ptolemy would probably have found soldiers more eager to enrol if he advertised the plan of returning to Macedon as soon as possible. Moreover, a separatist policy would come down to rebelling against the Argead royal house, an action the Macedonian soldiers would certainly not have supported (Meeus 2009a, 236–242).

5. The new regents

Partially as a result of the hijacking of Alexander's body, Perdikkas invaded Egypt and lost his life. That Ptolemy did not assume the regency after Perdikkas' death, although he seems to have been in a position to do so (Diod. 18.36.6), has also been used in support of the separatist interpretation.⁴⁰ Given how little we actually know about the situation, we should bear in mind that Ptolemy may have had a dozen good reasons for doing what he did, even if he wanted to get hold of Alexander's entire legacy. Diodorus mentions one good reason: offering the regency to Peithon and Arrhidaios was a suitable way to pay a debt of gratitude – if they did not recognize the poisoned chalice, that is. It is clear that the regency also had its disadvantages. As regent Ptolemy could no longer concentrate on the development of his power base in Egypt (Grainger 1990, 24). He would have had to intervene in all kinds of affairs throughout the empire: his own interests were too incompatible with those of the regency. Furthermore, at the time of Perdikkas' death Ptolemy had to be very careful not to become too suspect. His self-interested proposal at Babylon, his actions in Cyrene and Cyprus and the body-snatch all

indicated that he was a man of great ambitions who was determined to establish his own power.⁴¹ Now he had the chance to pretend that he was not so ambitious after all, and that he merely had been fighting a just war against Perdikkas. I see no indication of separatism in the whole event; only hindsight can lead to such an interpretation.

Peithon and Arrhidaios had to abdicate soon thereafter, and subsequently Antipatros was appointed regent at the conference of Triparadeisos. Scholars reasoning teleologically identify this as an important step in the disintegration process; for some it even was the end of the empire's unity. The old Macedonian traditionalist Antipatros would not have been interested in the areas outside Europe, and, consequently, in maintaining the unity of the empire, which stimulated its falling apart (e.g. Walbank 1981, 49; Will 1984, 37–38; Bosworth 2006, 13–14). Even if this judgement about Antipatros were correct – and there is reason to doubt it – it remained possible for one of the other Successors to eliminate all of his rivals and impose his authority on the entire realm. With retrospect, we know that this did not happen, but that does not tell us anything about people's expectations and ambitions at the time: Antipatros' appointment certainly did not constitute a point of no return.

6. Ptolemy's propaganda

Another striking example of how hindsight has shaped our understanding is the interpretation of the new coin type introduced by Ptolemy shortly after 320, or rather the interpretation of the change, because some scholars apparently were not concerned to interpret the iconography. That Ptolemy was the first to introduce a new type, seemed sufficient to conclude that he must have been a separatist.⁴² Will (1979, 39) notes: 'Par cette innovation qui introduit dans le monnayage de l'empire un élément personnel, Ptolémée prend ses distances par rapport à l'idée unitaire. Mais est-ce bien là ce-que signifie l'Alexandre au scalp d'éléphant?'. Will ends by asking the right question, but unfortunately does not try to answer it. The elephant-headress is not Alexander's only attribute on the coin's obverse: he also has the ram's horns of Zeus-Ammon and a diadem on his head; later series would add the aegis of Zeus. In other parts of the empire Alexander's types of Herakles with the Lion scalp continued to be struck unchanged. Such an important innovation as Ptolemy's must indeed mean something, but what? Evidently one has to analyse the inscription and iconography in order to conclude anything about that meaning.

It is crucial to note that these coins were still issued in the name of Alexander as indicated on the unchanged reverse. As to the iconography of the obverse of Ptolemy's coinage, the most important element for our

purpose is the elephant-scalp. It is striking that outside the Ptolemaic dynasty the motif only occurs in Bactria and in a series of coins of Seleukos after his Indian campaign (apart from Agathokles of Sicily's imitations of Ptolemy's coins).⁴³ We need not doubt the connection with Alexander's conquest of India.⁴⁴ In a recent study of the Alexander with elephant-head motif, Plantzos (2002; cf. Stewart 1993, 234–235) concluded that it could not refer to the conquest of India because Ptolemy was a separatist. However, this is to force the evidence to fit a theory which has no basis in the sources. It would be better method to argue that if the elephant-scalp refers to India, Ptolemy will not have been a separatist at the time he issued these coins.

Ptolemy used further means of propaganda: he wrote a history of Alexander's campaigns. Its date and its tendency are a matter of debate, but nowadays most scholars seem to accept that it had clear propagandistic aims. Although admittedly the evidence is rather limited, I see no reason to doubt that the work intended to present an apologetic image of Alexander and to emphasize and exaggerate Ptolemy's own part in the campaign while relegating his rivals to the background (Meeus 2013b, 304–305). Of course, the mere fact that Ptolemy wrote an apologetic text in which he presented himself as one of Alexander's main confidants and collaborators does not prove anything concerning his territorial ambitions. However, as with the hijacking of the king's body, it would be much more adequate propaganda to stress his part in Alexander's conquests if he actually aimed at ruling the entire empire.

Bosworth (2000) has recently argued conclusively that the so-called *Liber de morte testamentumque Alexandri*, a document which is preserved in the Alexander romance and in the *Metz epitome*, is a piece of Ptolemaic propaganda. It presents Kassandros as the murderer of Alexander, and Ptolemy as the one most loyal to the will of the late king. Several elements in the fake will are clearly to Ptolemy's advantage. It states that Alexander had to be buried in Egypt, and thus legitimizes the body-snatch. It also stipulates that the king's sister Kleopatra was to marry Ptolemy. Now, as we have seen earlier, Diodorus (20.37.4) says that Ptolemy did try to marry Kleopatra and that, like all the others, he did this in order to gain dominion of the entire empire. On the basis of these and other elements, Bosworth has shown that the whole document agrees very well with the ambitions of the satrap of Egypt to get hold of Alexander's entire legacy and was composed at the time he was trying to conquer parts of Asia Minor and Greece and to marry Kleopatra in 309–308. Indeed the attempted conquest of Greece is most easily explained if we assume that Ptolemy aimed to control the whole empire (Wheatley 2009, 59; Hauben 2013; Meeus 2013b,

289–293). If, on the other hand, Ptolemy were a separatist, these campaigns would indeed seem ‘somewhat bizarre adventures’, as Peters (1970, 78) styled them.

7. Kassandros and the Argead dynasty

According to Diodorus (19.52.1), Kassandros started to aspire to the kingship of the Macedonians (περιελάμβανε ταῖς ἐλπίσι τὴν Μακεδόνων βασιλείαν) after the deaths of Philip III, Eurydike and Olympias in 317/6. He gave Philip, Eurydike and her mother Kynnane a royal burial at Aigai, married Alexander’s half-sister Thessalonike, and founded a city named after himself, Kassandreia (Diod. 19.52.1; Müller 1973, 63–65; Landucci Gattinoni 2010, 113–116). Scholarly analysis of Kassandros’ actions seems to be a textbook example of possible misrepresentation from hindsight. It is often held that Kassandros preferred marrying Thessalonike, Alexander’s half-sister from a different mother, because he allegedly did not want to connect his kingship to that of Alexander, but rather to that of Philip II (e.g. Müller 1973, 63–65; Errington 1975, 151–152; Landucci Gattinoni 2010, 114). Unless we want to discard Diodorus – our main source for the period – it is clear that Thessalonike was only his second choice, and indeed it seems plausible that he only married Alexander’s half-sister after having failed to marry his much more popular full sister Kleopatra (Diod. 20.37.4, quoted above, section 1).

It is useful to look at Kleopatra’s case in more detail. After Alexander’s death, Kleopatra lived on for another fifteen years, surviving longer than any other close relative of Alexander’s except for his half-sister Thessalonike. Diodorus clearly states at 20.37 that the Diadochoi were very much interested in Kleopatra, and he makes the same claim elsewhere (18.23.3), as does Justin (14.1.7–8). Modern scholarship, on the other hand, does not seem to be equally convinced of her importance. According to Errington (1975, 148), ‘after Alexander’s death (...), oddly enough, Cleopatra seems at first to have been almost completely neglected by the generals (...)’. Carney (2000, 151) concludes from the analysis of this phase of Kleopatra’s life that ‘for the Successors, with the exception of Cassander’s unique situation, Argeads were unnecessary’ (Cf. also Völcker-Janssen 1993, 18). And she, like many other scholars, further concludes from this that the Diadochoi were not interested in continuing Alexander’s monarchy, but all aimed to set up a new, different kind of monarchy (Carney 1988). It is correct that Kassandros was the only one to marry an Argead woman, and that thus none of those establishing a lasting dynasty did so. Yet, it seems rather more probable that the Diadochoi did not want to create new dynasties; that rather the heirs of the only one who managed

to establish a true connection with the old dynasty, Kassandros, failed to make his dynasty last. This resulted in a world with three new dynasties, but that need not have been anyone's aim.

We know the contexts for the proposed marriages between Kleopatra and Leonnatos, Perdikkas, and Ptolemy, and I see no reason to doubt the other three mentioned by Diodorus. In spite of her popularity no one eventually married Kleopatra, because Leonnatos and Perdikkas both died before the wedding could take place, and when Kleopatra set out to marry Ptolemy, Antigonos had her killed, thus fatally obviating his own chances of marrying her, but more importantly preventing his rival from establishing a marital connection to the royal house. We are completely ignorant of the reasons why Kassandros and Lysimachos did not manage to marry Kleopatra, and of the reasons why Antigonos had not married her long before she accepted Ptolemy's proposal. But it should be clear in all these instances that failed attempts do not necessarily differ from successful ones in the ambition that drives them. In the end, no one married Kleopatra, but we should not conclude from hindsight that no one therefore really cared to do so and that Kassandros was unique in desiring a connection to the royal house (Meeus 2009b). Indeed Argeads were important to Kassandros because he actually had his power base in Macedon, but surely he was not the only one hoping to attain the Macedonian throne: his situation was far from unique in the eyes of contemporaries. Even without the marital connections, the major Hellenistic dynasties all claimed to be the legitimate continuators of the dynasty of Philip II and Alexander the Great well into the second century, though after Kleopatra's death they had to resort to fictitious family ties (Meeus 2009b, 87; Lianou 2010, 128–129). Several Successors expressed political continuity by striking Alexander coins (see below, section 9), and both Seleukos and Lysimachos circulated stories of them wearing Alexander's diadem to show how the conqueror had already sanctioned their kingship, thereby clearly envisaged as a continuation of his.⁴⁵

Whether, as some have suggested (Simpson 1957, 371–372; Huss 2001, 139), Kassandros was no longer interested in the regency of the empire at the time he married Thessalonike, is hard to ascertain, but the silence of the sources surely cannot be very telling (cf. Meeus 2013a). In 319, Kassandros had started a war over the regency (Diod. 18.49.1–3). Queen Eurydike had appointed him to the position of regent of the entire empire in 317 and informed Polyperchon, the former regent, and Antigonos, the general of Asia, that they had to obey Kassandros; the latter apparently was most grateful (Just. 14.5.3). Antigonos, on the other hand, managed to get Polyperchon on his side and claimed that he himself was the legitimate

regent in the proclamation of Tyre of 315 which was basically a frontal political attack against Kassandros (Diod. 19.60.1, 61.3). It therefore seems likely that Antigonos and Kassandros were engaged in a struggle for the regency. Being married to the minor king's aunt, Kassandros certainly had a strong claim to the position.

Another argument for Kassandros' alleged separatism is that he never campaigned outside of Europe. This is largely correct, even if it ignores that he did send troops to Asia on several occasions (Diod. 19.57.4, 19.68.2, 20.107.1). Of course, in all these instances Kassandros was probably helping his allies and trying to limit Antigonid power, but we should not forget that he was occupied almost constantly by the war against Polyperchon and the Antigonids in Europe: he could not start any campaigns in Asia without risking the almost certain loss of his homebase. Diodorus (19.69.1) claims that Antigonos assumed that Kassandros coveted the Asian parts of the empire, and I see no strong reason to doubt this, especially in light of Eurydike's letter to Antigonos (see above).

8. The peace of 311

The peace treaty that Antigonos, Kassandros, Lysimachos and Ptolemy concluded to end the Third Diadoch War in 311 also requires our attention. It provided that 'Kassandros be general of Europe until Alexander, the son of Rhoxane, should come of age; that Lysimachos rule Thrace, and that Ptolemy rule Egypt and the cities adjacent thereto in Libya and Arabia; that Antigonos have first place in all Asia' (Diod. 19.105.1). In spite of what Diodorus' wording may suggest, the treaty did not limit the power of Alexander IV to the European part of the empire: documents throughout the empire continued to be dated according to the regnal years of Alexander IV (Boiy 2007, 73–104). Indeed only Kassandros' position as general of Europe is limited in time, but this is for the simple reason that there was no need for such a general when an adult king capable of ruling was present in Macedon. Nonetheless, several scholars assume that this treaty meant the *de facto* break-up of the empire or even constitutionally fixed its dissolution.⁴⁶ What is striking is that some of these scholars at the same time note that the treaty was merely a truce or a breathing-space for some or all of the parties.⁴⁷ Indeed, the Successors clearly did not recognize the borders agreed on in the treaty, and very soon most of them were at war with each other again (Bosworth 2000, 214–215; Wheatley 2009, 57–58). However, that the empire did eventually fall apart does not necessarily mean that the territorial division proposed in the treaty of 311 was taken any more seriously than the aspect of peace by any of the parties. Within a few years Ptolemy and Antigonos both tried to conquer Greece, Ptolemy

tried to gain parts of Asia Minor, and Antigonos invaded Egypt. The sole purpose of the treaty was indeed to create a breathing-space.

9. The assumption of kingship

In 306 Antigonos adopted the royal title – giving it also to his son Demetrios –, and Seleukos, Ptolemy, Lysimachos and Kassandros had to follow suit. Although many scholars have seen this moment as the formal end of the empire's unity,⁴⁸ the existence of five kings – or rather six, including Demetrios, but that is immaterial for this point – does not necessarily mean there were five kingdoms. It is not impossible that each of them saw himself as the one and only true king over the exact same territory, the whole of Alexander's empire, considering the others as mere pretenders, and hoping to control the entire realm sooner rather than later.⁴⁹ The view that most of the Diadochoi apart from the Antigonids adopted the title to express their rule over part of the empire,⁵⁰ seems to be nothing more than an unfounded but widespread modern hypothesis. Gruen has shown that the sources do not suggest that any of the Successors held a limited territorial conception in assuming the title.⁵¹ An analysis of the propaganda of the Diadochoi seems to confirm that they all had the same ambition. We have already seen that Ptolemy exploited Alexander's image in many different ways: hijacking his body in order to officially bury him, writing a propagandistic history, imagery on coins, producing a fake will meant to prove that he was the only one loyal to Alexander's wishes, and trying to marry the late king's only full sister, Kleopatra.

Similar propaganda also emanated from the other courts. Most of the Diadochoi maintained Alexander's coin types after having assumed kingship themselves. It is very notable that Antigonos and Kassandros maintained the legend ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΟΥ even after they themselves had become kings (Hadley 1974, 52; Mørkholm 1991, 59–62; Stewart 1993, 263–265). They may just have been inspired by monetary motives – these coins were recognized and accepted everywhere – (Stewart 1993, 265–266; Arnold-Biucchi 2006, 35; Kroll 2007, 116), but it is not unlikely that there was more to it, especially given the legend. Imitations of Athenian silver coinage found in Egypt clearly copied the most prestigious Greek coin type for monetary reasons, but they could also carry the legend 'Artexerxes pharao' (Buttrey 1982). Thus, the striking of posthumous Alexander coins in his name can be considered a clear statement of political continuity.⁵²

Some of the kings did introduce significant changes to their coin types in the early years of the third century, putting their own names and portraits on their coins.⁵³ Ptolemy is usually considered the first to have done so

(Kroll 2007), but the introduction of this type has now been downdated to ca. 298/7 (Lorber 2005, esp. 60), i.e. around the same time as Demetrios and Seleukos introduced their own portraits on their coinage. It is no longer clear, then, who was the first to have introduced this bold innovation, but whoever it was, he need not have been a separatist.⁵⁴ If five kings were indeed laying claim to the same empire, and all of them were striking the same Alexander-type coins, it does not seem unlikely that one of them thought he could try to present himself as the only true king of this empire by minting coins with his own name, title and face on them.

10. The battle of Ipsos

Some years after the assumption of the royal title, in 302, a new coalition against the Antigonids came about after their successful conquest of Greece (Diod. 20.106.2–5, 21.1.2; Plut. *Demetr.* 28.1; Just. 15.2.15–17). This led to the battle of Ipsos where the coalition army defeated the Antigonids: Antigonos himself lost his life and the victors divided most of their possessions amongst themselves (Diod. 21.1.4b; Plut. *Demetr.* 28.3–29; Just. 15.4.22; App. *Syr.* 55). This moment is often taken as the definitive dissolution of Alexander's empire, as scholars are tempted to see the world of the three Hellenistic kingdoms taking shape from this point on.⁵⁵ However, in the 25 years after Ipsos there still occurred a number of significant changes: the dynasties of Kassandros and Lysimachos disappeared, Seleukos substantially enlarged his kingdom, as did Ptolemy who regained Cyprus and added – amongst other areas – the Aegean islands to his realm, Ptolemy Keraunos was briefly king of Macedon, and eventually Antigonos Gonatas established himself in Macedon. The outcome of this eventful period could easily have been different, as is clear especially from Seleukos' position after the battle of Kouropedion in 281, when he briefly added Macedon to his Asian empire; he was very close to controlling the whole of Alexander's empire (Grainger 1990, 183–191). Ipsos probably appears as a turning point for no other reason than that we have even less source material for the period after 302 due to the loss of the second half of Diodorus' *Bibliotheca*. If Demetrios appears as the main factor of unrest after Ipsos, as some hold,⁵⁶ could this be the result of Plutarch's biography of Demetrios' being our main source for this period? That the ambition of vast conquest is in this period only attested for Demetrios (Plut. *Demetr.* 43.2) may likewise be due to the state of the sources. There is no reason why the death of Antigonos would necessarily have limited the ambitions of the other Successors; the near collapse of the Antigonid empire may just as well have incited them to believe even more in their own chances with one fewer serious contender around.

It seems that the desire for universal empire even survived the first generation of the Successors and remained strong throughout the Hellenistic period.⁵⁷

11. Unsuccessful generals and unattested women

So far the focus has been on the well-known great figures of the era of the Successors. However, their eventual lack of success should not obscure the role played by several other individuals who may just as well have considered themselves serious contenders for the succession to Alexander.⁵⁸ Satraps such as Asandros of Karia, Arrhidaios of Hellespontine Phrygia, Peithon of Media, and Peukestas of Persia may have been much more important than we think from hindsight, and surely may have considered themselves important candidates for supreme power before they had to retire from the race or were killed. Given the summary nature of Diodorus' account, they actually appear comparatively often in important and ambitious roles. Peithon and Arrhidaios act as regents after the death of Perdikkas (Diod. 18.36.6–7; Arr. *Succ.* F1.30). Peithon, one of Alexander's bodyguards, is described as an ambitious man by Diodorus (18.7.4, 19.14.2), and repeatedly tried to gain control of the upper satrapies (Diod. 18.7.4; 19.14.1–2), possibly as a springboard for further conquests. When he planned to revolt against Antigonos in 316 the latter considered him a serious threat to his power and had him executed after having summoned him to his court with false promises (Diod. 19.46.1–4).

Another ambitious former bodyguard of Alexander who did not rise to prominence is Peukestas. He had held the command of the coalition of all eastern satraps against Peithon in 318 (Diod. 19.14.4), and he competed with Eumenes for the command of the coalition army in the war against Antigonos (Diod. 19.15.1, 17.2, 22; Plut. *Eum.* 14.3), in spite of Eumenes' royal commission as general of Asia (Diod. 18.58.1). Antigonos knew well why he had him removed from his satrapy like Peithon (Diod. 19.48.5). Lane Fox (2011, 14) probably underestimates Peukestas' ambitions in calling him a localized player and in expressing surprise at his Alexander-centred propaganda. A man like Kleitos who posed as Poseidon after a naval victory in the Lamian War (Plut. *Mor.* 338a), may likewise have considered himself a first-rank competitor until he was eliminated.

There is a similar problem with the Persian brides whom many leading Macedonians married at the Susa mass wedding in 324.⁵⁹ We know that Krateros divorced his Persian wife soon after Alexander's death (Memnon [FGrHist 434] F.4.4), and Seleukos' wife Apame is the only other one about whom we hear in the period of the Successors (Plut. *Demetr.* 31.3;

App. *Syr.* 57; *I. Didyma* 480). This has led many scholars to believe that immediately upon Alexander's death all the Persian wives except for Apame were repudiated.⁶⁰ With hindsight one may argue it is only natural for Alexander's successor in Asia to have kept his Persian wife (Funk 1974, 508; Ogden 1999, 119), but it was only in 320 that Seleukos was appointed satrap of Babylon, after having commanded the cavalry in the royal army for three years, and in 316 he was expelled from Babylon by Antigonos. Only after his return in 311 could he really start establishing a large empire in Asia, and yet he retained Apame for all this time. That Apame is the only Persian bride whom we know not to have been divorced, is explained easily enough by her historical importance as the mother of Seleukos' successor, Antiochos I. Some of the other Persian wives who did not reach such prominence may nonetheless also have been retained by their Macedonian husbands (Bosworth 2006, 16 with n. 42; Van Oppen de Ruiter 2011, 84–85). Several other Successors actually had good reasons not to repudiate their Persian wives. Perdikkas did not depose his father-in-law Atropates as satrap of Media, although his territory was diminished (Diod. 18.3.1 and 3; cf. Strabo 11.13.1); this may suggest that he also stayed married to Atropates' daughter. After all, Perdikkas was clearly one of those Successors who aimed for power in Asia (see above on Alexander's funeral cart). Eumenes was one of Perdikkas' supporters and worked with the indigenous population of his satrapy in Cappadocia (Plut. *Eum.* 4.2–3; Briant 1972). Nearchos, as we have seen, even tried to exploit the power that his marriage to a daughter of Barsine could give him (Curt. 10.6.1012). It is furthermore telling that Krateros' former wife Amastris did not disappear from sight, but remained politically active in her own right and later married Lysimachos, who kept her in a position of honour (Lund 1992, 75). Thus, her later political career may well be the reason why we hear of Amastris' divorce in the first place, rather than repudiation being the normal fate of the Susa brides. It seems clear, then, that at least one of the reasons for the common assumption that the Successors did not want to continue Alexander's policies towards the Oriental people is based on a misunderstanding from hindsight and limited information (cf. Meeus 2013a, 88–89 and 90–91).

12. Conclusion

It seems clear to me that if so much of our understanding of the period depends on teleological arguments, it is necessary to rethink the whole issue, and assess whether other interpretations might do more justice to the evidence. It may well appear that the empire did not fall apart because a minority coveting rule over the whole of it had to oppose much stronger

separatist forces, but rather that none of the many candidates for the succession managed to rid himself of all rivals and fulfil his ambition to become the sole continuator of the Argead dynasty and ruler of the Macedonian empire. Such, at any rate, is the interpretation suggested by the propaganda of the Successors and the judgement of the sources. The present analysis has revealed that we should take care not to confuse aim and result, ambition and strategy, failure and disinclination. Hindsight can be beneficial, but perhaps we are too eager to discard the judgement of our sources and replace it with our own hypotheses upon which we build further hypotheses.

Notes

* I would like to thank Ioanna Kralli, Anton Powell and Sofie Remijsen for helpful criticism on earlier drafts of this text. Both for the clarity of the argument and because readers who are interested in the problem of hindsight are not necessarily interested in pursuing studies of detail on the history of the Successors, this article at times repeats arguments that have already been published elsewhere (Meeus 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b, 2013b); I hope those primarily interested in the wars of the Diadochoi will forgive this repetition.

¹ Huizinga 1937, 64 (my own translation from Dutch).

² For a good general treatment of the period, see Waterfield 2011.

³ Bosworth 1988, 174: 'Alexander's death led inevitably to the dismemberment of his empire'; cf. Green 1990, 6; Cartledge 2004, 193; Rice 2006a, 33. Sekunda and Warry 2004, 132 claim that Alexander may even have foreseen that his generals would parcel out his empire amongst themselves. For less deterministic and more realistic assessments, see e.g. Westlake 1969, 326; Braund 2003, 21.

⁴ A small and random selection from innumerable examples: Edson 1934, 222; Rostovtzeff 1953, I, 5; Seibert 1967, 20; Milns 1968, 269; Rosen 1968, 182; Ehrenberg 1969, 138; Tarn 1969, 462–463; Müller 1973, 45; Cohen 1974, 177; Funck 1974, 508; Bengtson 1975, 19–20; Walbank 1981, 56; Buraselis, 1982, 7; Grant 1982, 5; Will 1984, 29; Grainger 1990, 87; Green 1990, 5–6 (but see 31); Heckel 1992, 163; Brodersen and Schmitt 2005, 240; Burstein 2007, 3–4; Demandt 2009, 383; Wheatley 2009, 55–59: 'this tension was always inevitable in the event of Alexander's untimely death, and was immediately evident in the settlement at Babylon in the weeks after June 11' (56); Cline and Graham 2011, 150; Heckel, Wheatley and Yardley 2011, 243. Further references are to be found in Gruen 1985, 263 n. 1. Billows 1989, 202–203 sees here a sign of a deep-rooted Macedonian tradition of centrifugalism. Those who see the period as a contest in which all aimed to become Alexander's sole successor, on the other hand, are rather rare: Price 1986, 317; Lund 1992, 51–52; Shipley 2000, 43; Braund 2003, 30; Adams 2006; Meeus 2007; Strootman 2013. Gruen 1985 has argued that all the Diadochoi wanted as much as possible without striving for the possession of Alexander's entire empire; cf. Carney 1988, 402; Bosworth 2002, 246–247.

⁵ Apart from the references for all the Successors in the previous note, see e.g.

Simpson 1957, 372; Hornblower 1981, 170–171; Buraselis 1982, 4–5; Errington 1986, 121; Wirth 1989, 206 n. 57; Landucci Gattinoni 2010, 117.

⁶ E.g. Simpson 1957, 372; Bengtson 1975, 19–20 and 33–34; Will 1979, 155 (claiming that everyone agrees on this, and that one can only agree); Hornblower 1981, 170; Ellis 1994; Hammond 1999; Erskine 2002; Plantzos 2002; Rodriguez 2004; Errington 2008, 42.

⁷ E.g. by Cloché 1959, 16; Seibert 1967, 22; Will 1984, 61.

⁸ E.g. Geyer 1925, 142; Müller 1973, 104; Funck 1974, 507; Wheatley 2009, 59.

⁹ Those who have doubted Antigonos' universalist ambitions are quite rare: Cloché 1959, 16 (expressing doubt without excluding the possibility; see also 176–178, 193–194 and 218–220); Goukowsky 1978, 119–120 and 126; Gruen 1985, 259–261; Billows (1990, 4) claims that 'at least as late as 311 he was ready and willing to accept peers as independent rulers of parts of the Macedonian empire', but the peace of 311 does not in any way imply definitive recognition of the territories of their adversaries by any of the Successors: see below, section 8. Wehrli (1968, 11) wonders whether 'l'opinion commune n'est ici, comme il arrive souvent, que la commune erreur?'. I agree that there may well be a common error, but I would think that it is the view that some of the Successors were separatists, rather than the argument that one or several of them were not. See also Meeus 2013b, 297–299.

¹⁰ Geyer 1925, 116: 'Doch sind die Kämpfe der Diadochen nur zu verstehen, wenn man in ihnen den erbitterten Kampf zwischen den Vertretern der Weltmachtsidee, die in Männern wie Perdikkas und Antigonos lebte, und den Großen sieht, die für die Bildung von Teilstaaten eintraten'.

¹¹ Gruen's case for avoiding hindsight has been criticized amongst others by Crawford 1976, 214, but they seem to be talking about different sides of the same medal. While Gruen's point is that teleology has to be avoided, Crawford argues that we need historical perspective; Gruen was not denying the latter and Crawford was not arguing for a deterministic and teleological approach. As Stockton 1977, 217 aptly put it, 'a historian may wear both hats, as long as he does not try to wear them both at the same time'. For Huizinga too the renunciation of hindsight (in the epigraph to this chapter) did not mean that he underestimated the importance of perspective: he refused to lecture on contemporary history because he thought he had nothing to say about it beyond what students could also read in the newspapers, as stated in a letter of his quoted by Den Hollander, Paul and Peters 2011, 2 in a theme issue of *History and Theory* about historical distance.

¹² On the problem of teleological approaches to history in general, see e.g. Fischer 1970, 209–13.

¹³ Heckel 2002, 86 identifies 'the very talent, the military potential and the large pool of candidates for supreme office' as an important cause of the empire's dismemberment, but to him distrust rather than ambition seems to have been the main factor in the process.

¹⁴ Will 1984, 61. One may also compare Toynbee's musings (1969, 440) about the world that would have been created had Philip II and Artaxerxes Ochos lived on. For claims to universality in the early Hellenistic period, see Strootman 2013.

¹⁵ On the meaning of the phrase ἡ τῶν ὅλων ἡγεμονία, see Seibert 1967, 19–20 n. 28; Errington 1975, 158–159; Hornblower 1981, 166–171; Lund 1992, 51–52; Lane Fox 2011, 13; Meeus 2013b, 265 n. 7; cf. Walbank 2002.

¹⁶ For the interpretation of Plb. 5.102.1, see Walbank 2002, esp. 135.

¹⁷ On the sources relating to Ptolemy, see Meeus 2013b, 265 n. 7. It need not surprise us too much that Lysimachos and Seleukos are absent from this list: in general they receive far less attention from Diodorus than the others, and unlike for Demetrios, no biography has been preserved; Appian's treatment of Seleukos I in his *Syriake* (53–64) remains rather brief. On the literary sources for Seleukos, see Primo 2009 and specifically for Diodorus' also Landucci Gattinoni 2005; however, I see no traces of the conflicting tendencies Landucci Gattinoni detects, and neither of their source attributions seems convincing to me. On the literary sources for Lysimachos, see Landucci Gattinoni 1992, 11–44.

¹⁸ Similarly misleading phrasing is often to be found in modern scholarship too: e.g. Bieber 1965, 185: 'the Diadochi (...) divided among themselves the Empire which [Alexander] had conquered'; Arnold-Biucchi 2006, 34: 'When Alexander died unexpectedly in 323, his empire was divided among his generals'; Rice 2006b, 611: 'When Alexander died in 323 BC, his empire was divided for purposes of administration among his generals'.

¹⁹ This may be due to the influence of Hieronymus of Kardia, a friend and countryman of Eumenes who joined the Antigonids after the latter's death, but Hieronymus' influence seems to be seriously overstated in most scholarship on the period: see Landucci Gattinoni 2008, XII–XVIII. An important factor no doubt is that Eumenes and Antigonos as well as Demetrios were tragic heroes with extreme ambitions who ultimately achieved nothing but their own downfall after many reversals of fortune. Plutarch certainly did not need Hieronymus' influence to choose Eumenes and Demetrios as protagonists for his lives. For Diodorus' fascination with their reversals of fortune, see e.g. 18.53, 18.59.4–6 and 21.1.4a. See also n. 17 above.

²⁰ See esp. Rosen 1968 and Cohen 1974, and the discussion of the peace of 311 below.

²¹ E.g. Will 1984, 61; Gruen 1985, 259 ('an imposing but unrealistic ambition'); Billows 1990, 4; cf. Errington 1986, 108; Arnold-Biucchi 2006, 34 who claims that 'even [Alexander] may not have succeeded in keeping such a vast and diverse territory under one ruler'. Billows 1990, 3–4 claims that it was 'obviously unrealistic for a power drawing its strength from the Balkans' to establish long-term rule over such a vast empire. However, this is the likely reason for Alexander's orientalizing policy and recruitment of foreign soldiers, and the Successors seem to have realized this too (cf. *infra*; Meeus 2013a, 90–91). For non-European troops in the armies of the Successors, see Plut. *Eum.* 4.2–3, 7.1; Diod. 18.45.3, 18.46.1–2, 18.51.1, 19.14.5, 19.16.3, 19.17.6, 19.27.6, 19.29.3, 19.40.3, 19.47.2, 19.80.4, 19.91.5, 19.92.4, 20.113.3.

²² Toynbee 1969, 441–486. In his 'If Ochus and Philip had Lived On' (*ibid.*, 421–440), on the other hand, Toynbee also seems to hold that it was unrealistic for a state of the size of the Achaemenid empire to survive for very much longer.

²³ Müller 1973, 100; Bengtson 1975, 19–20; Will 1979, 155; Green 1990, 119; Rodríguez 2004, 18; Burstein 2007, 3, who at the same time points out that 'it had been more than three hundred years since the power of an Egyptian king had extended over so much of the territory of Egypt's neighbors'. Cloché 1959, 15 also holds that Ptolemy immediately renounced the aspiration to control the entire empire, but he does not limit his ambitions to Egypt alone. One wonders what could have made Ptolemy decide immediately after Alexander's death that he wanted to secede Egypt from the empire and build his entire career there.

²⁴ Cloché 1949 has attempted to trace the development of Antigonos' ambitions, but there is little actual insight in the matter to be gained from the sources, apart from such isolated notices as Diod. 18.50.2.

²⁵ Meeus 2009a and 2009b, 68–70 with further references.

²⁶ Mørkholm 1991, 59–82; Stewart 1993, 263–265 and *passim*; Dahmen 2007, 6–17 and *passim*.

²⁷ Stewart 1993, *passim*; Palagia 2000; Cohen 2010, *passim*.

²⁸ Wirth 1989, 198 (my own translation from German); cf. e.g. Müller 1973, *passim*; Bosworth 1988, 180–181, and below on Ptolemy's hijacking of Alexander's body and the elephant scalp coinage. For the same reason Bingen (2007, 22–23) claims that Ptolemy could have found more relevant themes for his propaganda than the emulation of Alexander, but perhaps we should accept that Ptolemy himself knew best how he wanted to represent himself and that he was able to make the representation match his ambitions. That Alexander played an important role in the propaganda of Seleukos and Lysimachos seems to be explained more easily on the assumption that they were presenting themselves as Alexander's true Successor than by the sometimes rather petty reasons – such as Demetrios' dream about Alexander supporting Lysimachos and Seleukos at Ipsos – which Hadley 1974 argued for. The ambition to succeed Alexander does not help to explain many of the iconographic details on their coins, but it is common enough for such meanings of particular aspects of images to be beyond our grasp. Hadley, however, throughout his article seems to assume that the existence of the different kingdoms was a given without considering the possibility that both Lysimachos and Seleukos may have aimed at eliminating all of the others. The same seems to be the case in Lianou's treatment of Ptolemy's Alexander propaganda; she speaks of the 'attempt to establish continuity as the legitimate heirs to Alexander's Egypt' (2010, 128) as if nothing more could have been at stake.

²⁹ Jouguet 1926, 131: 'La pensée de partager l'Empire ne pouvait venir à l'esprit d'aucuns des grands chefs qui délibérèrent à Babylone, après la mort d'Alexandre. Si vives que fussent les ambitions de chacun, ces Macédoniens ne pouvaient songer à détruire l'oeuvre de la Macédoine'; Fontana 1960, 15 n. 5: 'Era troppo presto ancora perché il concetto dell'unità dell'impero potesse far nascere dubbi o tendenze separatistiche'; Ellis 1994, 24: 'From our perspective, the division of the empire seems inevitable. It cannot be overstressed that this solution was unthinkable to the leaders who gathered in Babylon around the corpse of Alexander the Great'.

³⁰ E.g. Bengtson 1975, 19–20; Will 1979, 155; Wirth 1989, 198 (quoted above); Green 1990, 119; Rodriguez 2004, 18; Wheatley 2009, 59.

³¹ For detailed analysis, see Bosworth 2002, 29–63; Meeus 2008.

³² E.g. Fontana 1960, 206; Mehl 1986, 25; Wirth 1989, 202; Burstein 2007, 3.

³³ Jouguet 1926, 132; Seibert 1969, 32; Errington 1970, 74; Mooren 1983, 232; Meeus 2008, 49–50.

³⁴ See also Pollitt 1986, 19. For the views of the Macedonians, see Arr. *Anab.* 7.6.2–5.

³⁵ For Perdikkas, see e.g. Müller 1973, 60; Will 1984, 35; Green 1990, 13; Erskine 2002, 171. For Ptolemy, see e.g. Müller 1973, 60–61; Errington 1975, 141–143; Bosworth 1988, 180; Green 1990, 13–14; Völcker-Janssen 1993, 24; Erskine 2002, 172–175.

³⁶ Errington (1975, 143 n. 2) follows Fraser who dates the transferral of Alexander's body to Alexandria in the first few years after the body-snatch.

³⁷ Cf. Carney 2002, 64 who remarks that for Macedonian kings '(...) excellence was not simply a matter of being good but of being better than any one else (...)'; Waterfield 2011, 132: 'by hijacking Alexander's corpse, he had declared himself Alexander's heir – and Alexander's heir should inherit Alexander's aggressiveness'. In summarising the traditional view on Antigonos' kingship Gruen 1985, 253, writes that with his universalist ambitions Antigonos can be considered '*the worthiest of Alexander's Successors* and most faithful to his aspirations' (my italics).

³⁸ Cf. Badian 1964, 258: '(...) it was he (Ptolemy) who snatched Alexander's body and buried it in his capital: at least for a while he clearly tried to create the image of himself as the true Successor'.

³⁹ On the protests of the soldiers at the Hyphasis and at Opis, see Carney 1996. For the revolt of the colonists in the east, see Will 1979, 27–29.

⁴⁰ E.g. Kuschel 1961, 17; Davis and Kraay 1973, 143; Bengtson 1975, 23; Will 1984, 36–37; Ellis 1994, 39; Erskine 2002, 172; Burstein 2007, 4.

⁴¹ Seibert 1969, 91–95, 108–110 and 113–114 on Ptolemy's interventions in Kyrene and Cyprus.

⁴² The view that the mere act of introducing a new coin type signalled separatist ambitions is expressed e.g. by Müller 1973, 62 and (carefully) Will 1979, 39. A similar conclusion is reached even after a study of the new type by Kuschel 1961, 16–18; Jenkins 1967, 60–64; Mørkholm 1991, 66; Plantzos 2002, 74–77; Rodriguez 2004, 30.

⁴³ Goukowsky 1978, 206: 'On ne peut qu'être frappé par la permanence d'une même symbolique royale de l'Égypte à la Bactriane'. In Seleukos' case his treaty with Chandragupta Maurya which gained him an elephant stable of 500 animals will definitely have established the connection between elephants and India. As Hauben (1974, 109) notes: 'Needless to say, this must have made quite an impression on the contemporary world.' For a thorough analysis of the elephant scalp motif on coinage, see Maritz 2004.

⁴⁴ This is recognized by most scholars: e.g. Bieber 1965, 185–186; Jenkins 1967, 60–61; Davis and Kraay 1973, plate 7, 8, 9; Hadley 1974, 52–53; Goukowsky 1978, 206–207; Pollitt 1986, 28; Smith 1988, 41; Svenson 1995, 106–107 and 112–113; Rodriguez 2004, 30; Arnold-Biucchi 2006, 35; Rice 2006a, 33; Boussac 2007, 202–203; Dahmen 2007, 113; Kroll 2007, 115; Lianou 2010, 127. I cannot here enter into the debate on the Mir Zakah coin depicting Alexander with the elephant scalp, as there is too much doubt about its authenticity: Boussac 2007, 203; Dahmen 2007, 9 with n. 13. Suffice it to say that if the coin is authentic, the link between India and the elephant scalp would be definitively proven.

⁴⁵ Arr. An. 7.22.5; App. Syr. 56 and 64; Just. 15.3.13–14; Müller 1973, 69 n. 146; Lund 1992, 157.

⁴⁶ E.g. Braunert 1964, 83–85; Wehrli 1968, 55, 62 and 73; Tarn 1969, 489; Klose 1972, 20 and 22; Davis and Kraay 1973, 145; Müller 1973, 107; Bengtson 1977, 371; Walbank 1981, 54; Will 1984, 52; Billows 1990, 135; Mørkholm 1991, 59; Sherwin-White and Kuhrt 1993, 120; Huß 2001, 168; Bingen 2007, 24; Landucci Gattinoni 2010, 116–117.

⁴⁷ Wehrli 1968, 56: 'Le traité de 311 était loin d'avoir fondé une véritable paix. Celle-ci, en effet fut bientôt violée, chaque signataire se servant de quelque spécieux prétexte pour agrandir son territoire'; Walbank 1981, 54; Will 1984, 53; Huß 2001, 168.

⁴⁸ E.g. Jouguet 1926, 180; Wehrli 1968, 62 and 73; Ehrenberg 1969, 138; Klose

1972, 22; Müller 1973, 107; Bengtson 1977, 371; Walbank 1981, 56; Will 1984, 58; Billows 1990, 159–160; Hammond 1999, 486; Huß 2001, 185; Brodersen and Schmitt 2005, 241; Erskine 2010, 19.

⁴⁹ Explicit evidence for such an outlook is available only for Demetrios (a single anecdote transmitted by Plut. *Demetr.* 25.4, *Mor.* 823c–d and Ath. 6.261b; cf. Hauben 1974), but the absence of evidence for the others does not prove that he was the only one to have such a view (contra e.g. Ritter 1965, 94). If the Antigonids could style the others as kings in official correspondence (Plut. *Demetr.* 18.2) without recognizing their kingship, then so could the others.

⁵⁰ e.g. Jouguet 1926, 180; Cloché 1959, 194–195; Ritter 1965, 94; Müller 1973, 100–107; Cohen 1974, 177; Hauben 1974, 106; Walbank 1981, 56; Will 1984, 57–58; Green 1990, 31 (with some reservations); Mørkholm 1991, 59; Hammond 1999, 486; Huß 2001, 185 with n. 701; Heckel, Wheatley and Yardley 2011, 242.

⁵¹ Gruen 1985; Landucci Gattinoni 1992, 131–132; Bosworth 2002, 246–247; Braund 2003, 30.

⁵² It has been interpreted as such for Antigonos (Edson 1934, 222 with further references), and there is no reason why this should be different for Kassandros or Lysimachos (Lund 1992, 163; Stewart 1993, 264–265), even in the case of other coin types depicting Alexander himself (Pollitt 1986, 26).

⁵³ A brief experiment to combine Alexander's name and his own in coin legends by Ptolemy (ΑΛΕΞΑΝΔΡΕΙΟΝ ΠΤΟΛΕΜΑΙΟΥ) around 311 had been abandoned very soon after its introduction, probably because it was deemed presumptuous: see Mceus 2013b, 283. Even more presumptuous was Antigonos' decision to have people in Asia date their documents according to his 'regnal' years as general from 315/4, while elsewhere the normal dating formulae with Alexander IV continued to be used (Boiy 2009 and 2010). No one, however, has ever suggested on this basis that Antigonos was a separatist, and indeed there is no reason to see any such measure by a Successor in this light: the promotion of their own name could serve many different ambitions.

⁵⁴ Those who did consider Ptolemy the first to have done so, often interpreted the measure as a further sign of his alleged separatism: e.g. Müller 1973, 101; Mørkholm 1991, 66; Rodriguez 2004, 33. For a different interpretation, see Mceus 2013b, 300–301.

⁵⁵ Geyer 1925, 138; Jouguet 1926, 185; Milns 1968, 269; Seibert 1969, 235; Tarn 1969, 504; Peters 1970, 81; Klose 1972, 22; Cohen 1974; Bengtson 1977, 371; Hornblower 1981, 103; Walbank 1981, 58; Grant 1982, 7; Mørkholm 1991, 59; Ellis 1994, 51; Huß 2001, 199; Errington 2008, 50; Demandt 2009, 384; Lianou 2010, 131; Lloyd 2011, 89; Dillery 2011, 217 deems the 'reunification of Alexander's empire now impossible'.

⁵⁶ E.g. Brodersen and Schmitt 2005, 241–242; cf. Will 1984, 101–109.

⁵⁷ Hornblower 1981, 170 with n. 278 (nuancing it at 171, however); Austin 1986, 456–457; Eckstein 2006, 86; Strootman 2013. Somewhat differently: Hauben 2013, 260–261.

⁵⁸ In very much the same way, Gruen (1974, 2) has noted that the history of the late Roman Republic 'should [not] be swallowed up by its dominant figures'.

⁵⁹ Diod. 17.107.6; Plut. *Alex.* 70.3; Arr. *Anab.* 7.4.1–8; Just. 12.10.9–10; Ath. 12.538b–539a.

⁶⁰ E.g. Briant 1972, 61; Bengtson 1975, 39; Will 1984, 28; Brosius 2003, 176–178.

Scholars have all too often neglected the polygamous nature of Macedonian royal households, but a new marriage did not require divorce from any previous wife or wives: van Oppen de Ruiter 2011, 84–85.

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HOW TO AVOID BEING A BACKWARD-LOOKING PROPHET – COUNTERFACTUALS IN POLYBIUS

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In January 2011, shortly after the Tunisian Revolution had toppled the regime of President Ben Ali, Michelle Angrist, a specialist in international relations, published an article in the respected *Foreign Affairs*, discussing future implications of that revolution and of related protests for adjacent regions. Angrist concluded that other countries such as Egypt or Syria were not likely to be seriously affected by the uprising, because ‘Arab dictators have proven resilient in the face of similarly daunting challenges.’² Today such an opinion appears to be almost misguided – but it was not an absurd assessment at the time. With an analysis of relevant factors such as the army, the people and international relations, Angrist presented coherent and plausible arguments for a completely different outcome to what, with hindsight, we know to have followed.

Only a few weeks later the governments in Egypt and Yemen faced the same fate as Tunisia, and Libyan dictator Gaddafi was confronted with massive turmoil within his nation. With knowledge of these events Marc Lynch, again a specialist in international affairs, wrote an article in the periodical *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, pointing out that for some people the events in Tunisia might have been a shock, but based on historical trends they were predictable, the course of events following an ‘inevitable’ structure.³ By alluding to a foreseeable domino effect, and considering the ongoing uprising in the Arab world as in part a consequence of the protests in Tunisia, Lynch’s assessment *ex post* disqualified Angrist’s view *ex ante*.

However, given that the events triggered by the Arab Spring will lead to lasting changes within Tunisia, Libya, Egypt and Syria, let us hope that any historian who is going to write about the revolutions in the Arab world is going to mention perceptions like that of Michelle Angrist. Even if she was ‘wrong’ in the strict sense and even if she failed to predict the right course of events, her view epitomizes the openness of history. By bringing forward a plausible scenario, Angrist’s suggestion reminds us of what was,

on existing theory, an equally possible alternative, a counterfactual development, which was very likely to happen and which represents the contingency of history.

To bring out this contingency within a narrative is perhaps one of the greatest challenges a historian is confronted with, for two reasons. Firstly, every narration of historical events tends to make the past course of events plausible, as it suggests 'inevitable' structures within a process, setting a beginning and a closure and connecting them with reasonable and consequential explanations.⁴ Secondly, every historian writes with knowledge of what was to follow (as, in this case, did Lynch), mostly focusing on causes that suggest the inevitability of certain developments, leaving out 'false' opinions, and is thereby prone to neglect the possibility of what might have happened. It is this which once prompted the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel to describe the historian as a 'backward-looking prophet', as the historian 'predicts' in his narrative exactly those events which actually took place.⁵ Of course, Schlegel was deeply ironic, and was alluding to prophecy made *ex eventu*, with hindsight.

Interpretation from hindsight has often been seen as a characteristic of the Greek historian Polybius. His reputation as a backward-looking prophet resulted from an almost teleological structure in his work; he suggested that Rome became the predominant power in the Mediterranean area due to a predictable or predestined course of events.⁶ Furthermore, his famous cycle of constitutions enforced the belief that Polybius thought of history as being an inevitable course of events.⁷

Despite what appeared to some as overwhelming proof of Polybius' hindsight, doubts remained. Assumptions about Polybius' view of a cyclical past were based upon studies of his famous digressions, such as his introduction or Book 6, neither of which matches his narrative record of historical events.⁸ It is surprising that the narrative element of the *Histories* has not been analysed by scholars in this connection; in contrast, students of Herodotus and Thucydides have readily assumed that the author's narrative will be revealing of his general idea of history.⁹ The present paper will study Polybius' narrative as potentially a key to his general ideas of the past, and will leave aside the awkward incongruity between certain explicit remarks in the above-mentioned digressions and implicit conceptions in the author's main narrative.

In opposition to what some scholars have argued regarding Polybius' work, I hope to show that Polybius is unjustly blamed for writing history only from hindsight. Polybius neither rounds his account into a circular structure with 'necessary results' nor does he assign all historical events to the will of a supernatural entity such as *tychē*. Instead, he emphasizes

unpredictability and succeeds in bringing out the contingency of the past. One of the narrative tools to be discussed here, by which Polybius points to divergent paths in history, is the counterfactual proposition. With his counterfactuals, Polybius gives weight to the openness of *kriseis*, of crucial moments in history, which could have played out differently, with grand consequences.

Unlike the work of other ancient historians from Antiquity, Polybius' text has not yet been analysed with regard to counterfactual thinking.¹⁰ Accordingly, I shall seek to distinguish techniques by which Polybius alludes to alternative courses of events. Section I will deal with explicit counterfactual remarks, and Section II with implicit narrative strategies which point to counterfactual outcomes.¹¹ Section III will seek to explain why Polybius makes frequent use of *virtual history* and how his counterfactual thoughts are closely connected with his aim to make his work a contribution to *paideia*.

I

First, to explicit counterfactual remarks in Polybius' text. By such I mean all mentions of different outcomes expressed by unreal conditional clauses, introduced with εἰ (μή) in the protasis and connoting unreality with ἄν or words such as ἔδει, χρῆν, εἰκὸς ἦν in the apodosis.¹² The importance of such remarks is well illustrated by the first example which deals with the beginning of the Second Punic War. Polybius explains the deep reasons (αἰτίαι) for Carthage's having been inclined to start a further war with Rome in the aftermath of the first clash between the two powers. He mentions as πρῶτον αἴτιον the indignation of Hamilcar, whose spirit had not been broken by the result of the first war and who was immediately determined to counterattack despite a peace treaty's having been accepted. Confronted with the consequent question why another war did not in fact break out, Polybius reflects on possible obstacles:

εἰ μὲν οὖν μὴ τὸ περὶ τοὺς ξένους ἐγένετο κίνημα τοῖς Καρχηδονίοις, εὐθέως ἂν ἄλλην ἀρχὴν ἐποιεῖτο καὶ παρασκευὴν πραγμάτων, ὅσον ἐπ' ἐκείνῳ.

Had not the mutinous outbreak among Carthage's foreign mercenaries occurred, he would very soon, as far as it lay in his power, have created some other means and other resources for resuming the contest. (3.9.8)

Instead of simply recounting what happened, Polybius attends additionally to the question of what might have happened. He challenges reality at a significant point in time, alluding to enormous consequences if history had

followed the path he sketches. The reader is forced to consider at least some alternative consequences. For example, would Hamilcar have led the Carthaginians to victory against Rome? If not, what would have happened to Rome afterwards with or without Hannibal's crossing the Alps and coming so close to success? Remarkably, Polybius refrains from elaborate virtual history, that is, from going into detail on possible outcomes; it is left to his readers to imagine potential implications. However, this perfectly corresponds to Polybius' way of looking at the past. Just as he questions the 'real' course of events by his counterfactual thinking, so too does he stick to his principles within his virtual history. He refuses to construct complex patterns of supposed consequences, since in his view everything that might have followed is as contingent as what really happened.¹³

Finally, by considering the sudden outbreak of a mutiny among the mercenaries as the only factor which prevented Hamilcar from resuming hostilities with the Romans, Polybius again avoids being a backward-looking prophet. I have shown elsewhere that the mercenary war is subtly depicted by Polybius as a contingent event, which was not predictable by any means.¹⁴ In combination with this, we are made aware that history sometimes opts for the side alley instead of taking the main route.

Our next example elucidates further aspects of counterfactuals in the *Histories*. After having discussed the occupation of Agrigentum by the Romans in 261 BC, Polybius moves on to their presumably most momentous decision during the First Punic War. Diverging from their original intention, the Romans were now no longer satisfied with having saved the Mamertines, and launched a large naval building-programme in order to drive the Carthaginians out of Sicily. However, the Romans lacked the knowledge of how to build powerful ships; their plan was made possible solely by the accident that a Carthaginian ship ran aground, fell into Roman hands and was used as a model:

...εἰ μὴ τοῦτο συνέβη γενέσθαι, δῆλον ὡς διὰ τὴν ἀπειρίαν εἰς τέλος ἂν ἐκωλύθησαν τῆς ἐπιβολῆς.

...it is evident that, if this had not occurred, they would have been entirely prevented from carrying out their design by lack of practical knowledge.
(1.20.16)

The Greek historian utilizes the smallest of detail to set up and 'stage' a counterfactual remark allowing the reader to further challenge the actual course of events. The reader is confronted with a blatant contrast: Polybius gives a brief comment but simultaneously points out tremendous consequences by questioning the whole campaign that was to follow if

only a tiny and unforeseeable incident had not transpired. Also, Polybius subsequently makes clear that the Romans' decision for naval warfare, without which they would not have had the opportunity to defeat the Carthaginians, became the pivotal point during the conflict.¹⁵ He prompts the reader to weigh immediately the conspicuous implications of his counterfactual idea, i.e. of the Romans' remaining insufficiently knowledgeable to build powerful ships, against the odds that the accident, the shipwreck, would happen.¹⁶ Moreover, in order to highlight that the latter was in some respect a lucky coincidence, Polybius frames his conditional statement with a negative protasis. This technique focuses reflection on an unreal event, and suggests that what actually happened was not to be expected.¹⁷

Along with explicit counterfactual remarks, we also encounter many semi-explicit forms of allusion to alternative paths of history; these constitute further narrative strategies of writing against hindsight. An inconspicuous form of counterfactual remark, without the eye-catching introduction by *εἰ* or *εἰ μή*, is the unreal conditional involving *παρ' ὀλίγον*, hinting at a possible different outcome, at what 'nearly' happened. Here too there is reference to the contingency of the past, a claim that history was just short of taking the path being described in the unreal conditional. When narrating the sea battle of Tyndaris, which took place between Carthage and Rome around 257 BC, Polybius notes how close the Roman advance guard came to being sunk by their enemies. The Carthaginians managed to surround the opposing fleet along with the flagship of the commander C. Atilius. Whereas some Roman ships were destroyed, Atilius himself managed to escape:

...τὰς μὲν ἄλλας διέφθειραν, τὴν δὲ τοῦ στρατηγοῦ ναὺν παρ' ὀλίγον αὐτανδρὸν ἔλαβον. οὐ μὴν ἄλλ' αὕτη μὲν ταῖς ὑπηρεσίαις ἐξηροτυμένη καὶ ταχυναντοῦσα διέφυγε παραδόξως τὸν κίνδυνον...

...they sank the rest of them and almost took the admiral's ship with its crew. However, as it was well manned and swift, it foiled their expectation (παραδόξως) and got out of danger... (1.25.3)

Again, the reader is confronted with an alternative course of events. The 'commentary' adverb *παραδόξως* lays emphasis on the slim chance of the Romans' escape and underlines that history did not follow the path which was expected according to the circumstances. Polybius points out that what did not happen (i.e. the capture of Atilius' ship) must have appeared even more probable than what actually happened (the salvation of that ship). The combination of *παρ' ὀλίγον* and *παραδόξως* is effectively worked: the latter term shows the reader that everything could have ended up quite

differently and was by no means predictable, the former emphasising the narrow gap between two potential developments with entirely different consequences.

To sum up, these allusions to divergent outcomes should attract more attention than they have traditionally received, for two reasons in particular. First, they can be found in many passages of the *Histories* and always deal with matters that deserve close inspection. Polybius not only throws in unreal conditionals, but conveys his counterfactual reflections with various narrative techniques, achieving a careful balance between reality and imagination. Second, from his widespread deployment of virtual history, we see that Polybius wants to make his readers aware of the general contingency of the past: everything that happened was neither necessary nor impossible.¹⁸

II

Polybius employs additional methods to highlight the contingency of the past and to prompt readers to conceive a course of events parallel to the one which actually occurred. It will be useful to refer to Gary S. Morson's concept of *sideshadowing* (also mentioned in Lisa Hau's contribution to this volume).¹⁹ In analysing Russian literature, Morson observes how narratives tend to fade out the contingency of reality. For example, they are arranged by a teleological structure that heads for a specific closure; they focus only on persons and occurrences that are important for the development of the story; they often leave out stalemates or dead-ends that would have proved irrelevant *e posteriori*. In short, narratives are characterized by hindsight, even if there is no allusion to the outcome in the course of the story. In contrast, Morson coins the term 'sideshadowing', to refer to all narrative techniques used by authors to counter our tendency to view later events as the predictable product of what has preceded:

Sideshadowing restores the possibility of possibility. Its most fundamental lesson is: to understand a moment is to grasp not only what did happen, but also what else might have happened.²⁰

Morson applied his concept to authors such as Dostoevsky and Tolstoy; we shall apply it to Polybius.

Sideshadowing within the *Histories* allows the past to unfold as an undetermined situation. One category of this technique applies to speeches and plans of certain protagonists. In his book *Ungeschehene Geschichte* ('History which did not Happen'), Alexander Demandt points out that

historians, in order to avoid being misled by hindsight, have to view the past from the perspective of those involved in action at that time. By presenting their intentions, plans, tactics and strategies, a historian may enable the reader to reconstruct the original setting with which the protagonists were confronted and to plunge into the deep pool of possibilities as they perceived them.²¹

For Polybius, we may track subtle techniques of *sideshadowing* within the speeches of his protagonists. The role of speeches in the *Histories* has been widely treated by scholars, but very largely with regard to the authenticity of their content and to Polybius' apparent dependence on Thucydides.²² However, speeches in the *Histories* also allow us to penetrate the inner life of the protagonists, by outlining a wide range of what the latter saw as possible outcomes, in addition to what the historian knows to have been the eventual outcome. In this context, we are concerned not with whether the speeches were actually delivered, but with the way that Polybius uses them to explicate the past.

As a prelude to the Battle of the Trebia between the Romans and Carthaginians in 218 BC, Polybius shifts the narrative perspective towards the Romans. Their commander Scipio speaks to his legions, setting out arguments for expecting a Roman victory (which the historian knew not to have resulted). It is striking that Scipio's speech seems to be directed rather to the reader than to his troops, as the Roman general gives a full account of the actions he took in preparation for the battle. Scipio concludes that the Romans will win this clash with Hannibal, and he justifies his opinion by enumerating the disadvantages faced by their enemy. Hannibal has lost a great deal of his army, and the surviving troops were useless owing to the hardships they had endured. The same applied to his horses, most of which were dead or sick (3.64.8). In contrast to another part of the speech, which is thoroughly rhetorical and presents dubious, one-sided judgements on earlier encounters with Hannibal (3.64.10), Scipio's assessment of the Carthaginians' army appears to the reader to be entirely realistic. First, the words of the Roman consul nearly coincide with a status report on Hannibal's troops outlined by Polybius just a few chapters before (3.65.2).²³ In aligning Scipio's subjective opinion with an 'objective' assessment, Polybius puts both of them on the same level of truthfulness. Next, Polybius frames Scipio's words as a realistic evaluation:

πάντων δὲ καὶ διὰ τὴν τοῦ λέγοντος πίστιν καὶ διὰ τὴν τῶν λεγομένων ἀλήθειαν
ἐκθύμως ἔχόντων πρὸς τὸ κινδυνεύειν, ἀποδεξάμενος αὐτῶν τὴν ὁρμὴν διαφῆκε,
προσπαρακαλέσας ἐτοίμους εἶναι πρὸς τὸ παραγγελλόμενον.

When all the troops, owing to the authority of the speaker, and the truth of what he said, showed themselves most ardent for battle, he commended

their alacrity and dismissed them, bidding them hold themselves in readiness to execute his orders. (3.64.11)

The Roman army believes in its general, as he speaks the truth. The words διὰ τὴν τῶν λεγομένων ἀλήθειαν justify this faith, as they not only represent the troops' perspective, but also correspond with Polybius' own assessment.

Thus, by means of Scipio's speech Polybius again presents a potential course of events, which – according to a rational evaluation of experience (Scipio refers to past examples and thinks κατὰ λόγον) – was most likely to happen, but did not come to pass. Although Polybius is not able to change the validity of the past, he vividly depicts a second outcome. The reader is invited to consider the side-routes of history, and not to follow only the main course of events.

We can run through various forms of portrayal of an undecided past in the *Histories* which involve other implicit counterfactuals. One of these is the famous debate between the Aitolian Chlaineas and the Akarnanian Lykiskos in book 9.²⁴ Criticisms of Polybius for writing history from hindsight have been based upon Lykiskos' famous words 'cloud from the west', which refer to Rome and might suggest that Polybius fully anticipated the conquest of Greece by the Roman empire.²⁵ Lykiskos' allusion to such a threat may well seem premature at around 210 BC. But this statement should not be isolated from its context, and in particular should not be read without the implicit objection made to it by the Aitolian Chlaineas. Whereas Lykiskos warns about the prospect of Rome's interfering in and dominating Greek affairs, Chlaineas in his speech, also dealing with the contemporary situation, omits any mention of Rome and therefore presents a scenario which does not assume full-scale intervention by the new power from the West. Moreover, Polybius explicitly adds that Chlaineas' speech exactly mirrored the expectations of his contemporaries, since Rome itself faced enormous troubles at the time. The reader is clearly to understand that not all events of the period pointed to a subsequent Roman intervention in Greece.

Apart from speeches, we can also trace implicit counterfactuals in Polybius in the form of plans or intentions. An example is Polybius' report of the capture of Achaïos by Antiochos III in 213 BC. Achaïos, commander of Asia Minor since 223 BC, was falsely accused of treason and besieged by Antiochos in Sardis. Although able to offer resistance for some time, Achaïos was finally trapped by Bolis, who, falsely offering to help him escape from Sardis, handed him over to Antiochos. Polybius elaborates on this story, describing plans and intentions on both sides. Again, reality and virtual history gradually merge, as the reader is also confronted with schemes conceived by Achaïos, whose plans will never come into effect but

are vigorously put forward. In addition, Polybius twice qualifies Achaïos' actions, saying that he 'indeed was doing his best' (8.19.1 and 5). For a moment, a successful escape appears to be within reach. Again, by means of a dual scenario, Polybius communicates that history is full of contradictory possibilities.²⁶

Despite all these views from different angles – be it counterfactual remarks from the historian's perspective or sideshadowing from the viewpoint of the historical protagonists – Polybius does not leave his readers uncertain about why certain things happened. In accordance with his claim to present the factors *πῶς καὶ πότε καὶ διὰ τί* ('how, when and why', 3.1.4) the Romans were able to conquer the whole world, Polybius wants to show the reasons for which history happened; he does not, however, seek to show why it was bound to happen or that the whole course of events was without any cause.²⁷

Another method of illuminating the openness of certain situations has been labelled by Morson as 'aesthetic potentiality'. This narrative technique exploits readers' expectations by playing on everyone's tendency to attach importance to what the author chooses to make explicit. As Morson argues, a major difference between a narrative and real life lies in the fact that readers of fiction know very well that the whole plot is an artificial construct structured according to a plan, and automatically seek to ascribe a relevant value to every aspect which is mentioned within the text:

Readers of novels are trained to seek significance. When at the beginning of *Great Expectations*, Pip gives a pie to a convict, the reader knows that this event will mean something or it would have not been narrated.²⁸

The same applies to historical narratives. Historians must structure a plot, in which they cannot afford to mention all possible factors. They have to select certain aspects which they consider as bearing an influence on what happened afterwards, and to leave out most elements which, in their view, did not directly contribute to a certain outcome. For example, if an author mentions a historical person, every reader will automatically conclude that this person is about to play an important role for the following course of events. Or to put it another way, ease of reading would suffer badly if a historian did not significantly reduce his *dramatis personae* according to the prospect of their influence. We do not, however, have to rely on Morson alone. Aristotle expressed a similar rule:

χρὴ οὖν...καὶ τὰ μέρη συνεστάναι τῶν πραγμάτων οὕτως ὥστε μετατιθεμένου τινὸς μέρους ἢ ἀφαιρουμένου διαφέρεισθαι καὶ κινεῖσθαι τὸ ὅλον· ὃ γὰρ προσὸν ἢ μὴ προσὸν μὴδὲν ποιεῖ ἐπίδηλον, οὐδὲν μόνιον τοῦ ὅλου ἐστίν.

...and the component incidents must be so arranged that if one of them be transposed or removed, the unity of the whole is dislocated and destroyed. For if the presence or absence of a thing makes no visible difference, then it is not an integral part of the whole. (*Poet.* 1451a30–35, trans. W. H. Fyfe)

As Morson suggests, an author can exploit this reaction of the reader for his own purposes and create the powerful technique of *sideshadowing*. For example, Tolstoy in *War and Peace* introduces Prince Adam Czartoryski, who is said to be one of those men ‘who decide the fate of nations’. But every reader expecting Prince Adam to play an important role in the story is disappointed since nothing of the sort happens and the reader is obliged to recognize the contingency of narration.

To apply this modern approach appropriately to Polybius and not to impute to him an unrealistically theoretical mode of composition, we may apply the following general guideline. An author creates *sideshadowing* by mentioning factors, but only those, which seemed to be meaningful at a specific moment, even if they did not trigger significant consequences afterwards. Bearing this raw definition in mind, we are able to trace a version of ‘aesthetical potentiality’ within Polybius and to come to an unexpected result.

Book 1 provides two examples, which vividly illustrate this variation of implicit counterfactuals in the *Histories*. When some Sicilian cities changed sides and joined Rome against the Carthaginians in 263 BC, Hieron decided to make peace with the Romans. Subsequently, Polybius explains why Rome accepted this offer. Confronted with Carthaginian supremacy at sea, which seriously threatened their supply routes, the Romans came to terms with Hieron, hoping to gain important support for the following years (1.16.4–8). By pointing out this consideration, Polybius brings back the openness of that particular moment, when no one could foresee that Rome would shortly build a powerful navy. Hieron, despite remaining an influential player who backed up his allies throughout the whole conflict, did not play a role as important as many would have anticipated at the outset of the First Punic War. His ‘decreasing’ influence is represented by his complete absence from Polybius’ narrative of that war. He is not mentioned until chapter 1.83.2, in connection with the Mercenary War. Since Polybius emphasizes the contingent character of Rome’s naval programme initiated by a lucky accident, we better understand Hieron’s significance, his potential importance, in 263 BC; we are helped to reflect on a possible alternative course of the First Punic War.

Likewise, when Regulus captured Tunis in 256 BC, the conflict between Rome and Carthage was on the brink of conclusion more than 14 years before conclusion actually happened. Polybius describes this moment as a

far-reaching incident, since Tunis provided the best opportunities to launch an assault on the Carthaginian capital (1.30.15). Additionally, the Numidians inflicted heavy damage on the Carthaginians, who at that time were close to surrendering. If we read on, we recognize why Polybius stresses this almost-quality, focusing our view on an alternative course of events. Carthage is not defeated, as a result of the sudden and entirely unforeseeable appearance of the Spartan general Xanthippos. He manages to revive the spirits of Carthaginian soldiers and leads them to a triumphant victory against Regulus' army, which has to withdraw and to give up the advantageous position it had previously obtained. The capture of Tunis is portrayed in its momentary importance by Polybius, but history did not move along this course of events and had both sides fight for some more years.

III

Polybius can thus be seen resisting, effectively and in various ways, temptation to write from hindsight.²⁹ How do his many counterfactuals connect with his general intention in writing history? If we go back to the very beginning of the *Histories*, we are reminded of the *paideia* objective, which Polybius ranks as a priority for his work.

ἐπεὶ δ' οὐ τινὲς οὐδ' ἐπὶ ποσόν, ἀλλὰ πάντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀρχῇ καὶ τέλει κέχρηται τούτῳ, φάσκοντες ἀληθινωτάτην μὲν εἶναι παιδείαν καὶ γυμνασίαν πρὸς τὰς πολιτικὰς πράξεις τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας μάθησιν, ἐναργεστάτην δὲ καὶ μόνην διδάσκαλον τοῦ δύνασθαι τὰς τῆς τύχης μεταβολὰς γενναίως ὑποφέρειν τὴν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων περιπετειῶν ὑπόμνησιν...

But since all historians, one may say without exception, and in no half-hearted manner, but making this the beginning and end of their labour, have impressed on us that the soundest education and training for a life of active politics is the study of History, and that the surest and indeed the only method of learning how to bear bravely the vicissitudes of fortune is, to recall the calamities of others... (1.1.2).

There are further passages stressing this feature of writing history.³⁰ In short, learning from history forms a major aspect of Polybius' intention for his work. To this end, counterfactuals better enable readers to assess the plans and actions of certain protagonists. As Demandt has stated, 'Without counterfactual history we are not able to assess the deeds of the historical protagonists. If we want to hold someone responsible for his actions, we presuppose that he had different opportunities to choose from.'³¹ Counterfactual considerations reveal those opportunities.

The close connection between the counterfactual and the didactic is

visible in the many unreal conditionals to which Polybius gives a didactic closure. Having described the Battle of Sellasia (222 BC), the historian informs the reader that the Spartan commander Eukleidas committed a serious mistake: instead of advancing against the enemy, Eukleidas had his troops remain at the summit of a hill, wasting a magnificent opportunity to inflict heavy damage. Through a counterfactual remark, Polybius reveals to the reader a tactic superior to the one Eukleidas employed, enabling the viewer to learn something general from a specific historical event:

τοῦτο δ' ἦν ἐκ πολλοῦ συναντῶντας καὶ προσπίπτοντας τοῖς πολεμίοις τὰ μὲν ἐκείνων στίφη συνταράττειν καὶ διαλύειν, αὐτοὺς δ' ὑποχωρεῖν ἐπὶ πόδα καὶ μεθίστασθαι πρὸς τοὺς ὑπερδεξίους ἀεὶ τόπους ἀσφαλῶς· οὕτω γὰρ ἂν προλυμνηνόμενοι καὶ συγγέαντες τὸ τοῦ καθοπλισμοῦ καὶ τῆς συντάξεως ἰδίωμα τῶν ὑπεναντίων ῥαδίως αὐτοὺς ἐτρέψαντο διὰ τὴν τῶν τόπων εὐφυνίαν.

They could have charged the enemy while still at a distance, breaking his ranks, throwing them into disorder, and then could have retreated slowly and returned in safety to the higher ground. Thus having in the first instance spoilt and broken up that peculiar serried formation of the enemy so well adapted to their special equipment, they would easily have put them to flight owing to their favourable position (2.68.4–5).

Here, *virtual history* and learning from history work together. There are several further examples in the text of the *Histories*, including a prominent one which concerns Philip V of Macedon. For his war with the Illyrian Skerdilaidas, Philip, according to Polybius, had carefully prepared an elaborate and accurate plan at the outset of the conflict. Having built and equipped a fleet of ships, he trained his crews for the new challenge, and sought information about the Roman navy operating in the area. Just as he was approaching the mouth of the river Aoüs he was falsely told that all the Roman ships were cruising nearby. Philip was seized by such panic that he set sail and retreated to Kephallenia. Not until reaching the safe port, did he realise that he had been deceived. Polybius comments:

ἦν Φίλιππος εἰ μὴ πτοηθεὶς ἀλόγως ἔφυγε, τῶν περὶ τὴν Ἰλλυρίδα πράξεων μάλιστ' ἂν τότε καθίκετο διὰ τὸ τοὺς Ῥωμαίους πάσαις ταῖς ἐπινοίαις καὶ παρασκευαῖς περὶ τὸν Ἀννίβαν καὶ τὴν περὶ Κάνναν μάχην γίνεσθαι, τῶν τε πλοίων ἐκ τοῦ κατὰ λόγον ἐγκρατῆς ἂν ἐγεγόνει.

Had Philip not taken fright so absurdly and fled before this squadron, now was the opportunity for him to make himself master of Illyria, the whole attention and all the resources of the Romans being concentrated on Hannibal and the situation after the battle of Cannae; and most probably the ships would have fallen into his hands also (5.110.10).

Polybius both reminds his readers of the contingent structure of history and provides an illustrative lesson in not taking important measures

without having checked relevant facts. Counterfactual consideration accompanies the didactic purpose.

Polybius has a further reason for employing *sideshadowing*. Modern psychological science has interesting findings on counterfactual thinking, which involve both the intentional and the unintentional embedding of counterfactuals. In their volume *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics*, James Olson, Neal Roese and Ronald Deibert discuss psychological biases which prompt people to construct alternative outcomes. Referring to a wide range of studies, they conclude that humans focus on exceptional, unusual, or salient antecedents:

That is, in naturally occurring counterfactual thoughts, perceivers typically mutate exceptional or unexpected antecedents to be more routine or expected (and then contemplate whether the outcome would have been different if things had been more normal).³²

Olson, Roese and Deibert cite the scenario-study carried out by the psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, in which subjects were told that a man was killed in a car accident on the way home from work. Some subjects learned that he left work early, but drove home using his usual route. Other subjects were informed that he left work at his usual time but took an unusual route home. When all participants of the study were asked how the accident could have been avoided, the former subjects changed the exceptional departure time 'he would still be alive, if he had left at the usual time', but not his route, whereas the latter subjects changed the exceptional route home 'he would still be alive, if he had taken his usual road', but not the departure time. In short, unexpected events are stimuli to counterfactual thoughts.

If we look now at Book 2 of the *Histories*, we may identify a key aspect of Polybius' way of writing history. After having described the events that took place in Italy, Sicily and Africa up to the Roman victory against the Insubrians in 223 BC, he turns towards events in the eastern Mediterranean, and makes a significant statement at the outset:

περὶ μὲν οὖν τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ἀσίαν καὶ τῶν κατὰ τὴν Αἴγυπτον ἀρκούντως ἂν ἔχοι ποιεῖσθαι τὴν ἀνάμνησιν ἀπὸ τῶν νῦν ῥηθέντων καιρῶν[...], ἐν δὲ τοῖς καθ' ἡμᾶς καιροῖς μὴδὲν αὐτοῖς ἐξηλλαγμένον ἀπηντῆσθαι μὴδὲ παράλογον ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ὥστε προσδεῖσθαι τῆς τῶν προγεγονότων ὑπομνήσεως.

As for Asia and Egypt, it will suffice to mention what took place there after the above date [...] in our own times Fortune has wrought no such unpredictable change in these countries as to render any notice of their past necessary. (2.37.6)

Here, Polybius skips the ancient history, since it does not provide any events that happened unpredictably (μηδὲ παράλογον). This passage represents Polybius' thinking generally.³³ Attention is drawn only to what happened unexpectedly, when protagonists accomplished something that either seemed to be beyond all expectation, or exceeded their realm of influence. This being one of Polybius' main objects, it is unsurprising that, like the participants in modern psychological experiments, he looks for usual antecedents for his unusual events – which might have given a different outcome.

Polybius is, however, aware of a danger, from his pedagogic viewpoint, in privileging the contingent structure of history. His narrative may, by apparently breaching normal sequences of cause-and-effect, teach false lessons – or simply seem irrelevant to normal experience.

δυεῖν γὰρ ὑπαρχόντων τελῶν, ὠφελείας καὶ τέρψεως, πρὸς ἃ δεῖ τὴν ἀναφορὰν ποιεῖσθαι τοὺς διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς ἢ διὰ τῆς ὁράσεως βουλομένους τι πολυπραγμονεῖν, καὶ μάλιστα τῷ τῆς ἱστορίας γένει τούτου καθήκοντος, ἀμφοτέρων τούτων ὁ πλεονασμὸς ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐκπληκτικῶν συμπτωμάτων ἐκτὸς πίπτει. ζηλοῦν μὲν γὰρ τίς ἂν βουλευθεῖ τὰς παραλόγους περιπετείας; οὐδὲ μὴν θεώμενος οὐδ' ἀκούων ἥδεται συνεχῶς οὐδεὶς τῶν παρὰ φύσιν γενομένων πραγμάτων καὶ παρὰ τὴν κοινὴν ἔννοιαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων.

For since there are two objects, improvement and pleasure, which those who wish to study any subject either by the use of their ears or of their eyes should keep before them, and since this is especially true of the study of history, a too-generous treatment of sensational events contributes to neither. For not only do abnormal reversals of fortune arouse no emulation, but no one has any permanent pleasure in seeing or reading of things which are contrary to nature and contrary to the general sentiment of mankind. (15.36.3–4)

By introducing counterfactual remarks of his own, Polybius is able to multiply realistic lessons about causal sequences; he is also enable thereby to privilege the unusual event while guarding against any impression of the miraculous, the unexplained, which might have left his reader not pedagogically instructed so much as logically disarmed.

One last question remains: if Polybius was convinced that everything could have happened differently and if he put emphasis on unexpected events, why do we encounter passages where he considers Rome's rise and many other events as the plot of *tychē*?³⁴ On this subject there has been in recent years a significant change in scholarly opinion. *Tychē* was regarded as an essential historical factor for Polybius, up to the time of Walbank and Pédech. However, *tychē*'s role as a plotting deity with direct influence on all events has now been much questioned, first by Roveri (1982),

then by Hau (2011), Brouwer (2011) and Maier (2012). Doubts should arise, on whether Polybius attributed to this agency a major part in the shaping of history, if we look at 1.63.9, where he emphasizes that Rome won her empire by her own will and skill, not through the help or plan of *tychē*:

ἐξ ὧν δῆλον τὸ προτεθὲν ἡμῖν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ὡς οὐ τύχῃ Ῥωμαῖοι, καθάπερ ἔνιοι δοκοῦσι τῶν Ἑλλήνων, οὐδ' αὐτομάτως, ἀλλὰ καὶ λίαν εἰκότως ἐν τοιούτοις καὶ τηλικούτοις πράγμασιν ἐνασκήσαντες οὐ μόνον ἐπεβάλλοντο τῇ τῶν ὅλων ἡγεμονίᾳ καὶ δυναστείᾳ τολμηρῶς, ἀλλὰ καὶ καθίκοντο τῆς προθέσεως.

This confirms the assertion I ventured to make at the outset that the progress of the Romans was not due to *tychē* as some among the Greeks think, and was not involuntary, but that by schooling themselves in such vast and perilous enterprises it was perfectly natural that they not only gained the courage to aim at universal dominion, but executed their purpose.

Other passages of the *Histories* express a similar view.³⁵ Furthermore, it seems as if Polybius had no concrete concept of *tychē* to justify the assumption that he actually believed in her direct intervention.³⁶ This has led Hau to distinguish between a *scientific* and a *rhetorical* Polybius, 'who uses *tyche* freely, often as a predestining force directly involved in human affairs, in order to arouse emotion, lend importance to his theme, and keep his audience engaged.'³⁷ Thus, *tychē*'s function recedes as a factor in Polybius' explanation of historical events. Considerations about Polybius' counterfactuals are of course not sufficient to prove that point, but they may strengthen the view expressed by Hau and others. As we have seen above, Polybius was convinced of the contingency of the past. His *virtual history* and his *sideshadowing* confirm on a narrative level that he saw Rome's progress as other than the plan of *tychē*, and as not being without alternatives.

IV

If, in a few years, a book on the Arab Revolution is to be published, Angrist's 'false' opinion is very likely to be omitted. Her assumption did not turn out to be right and all events that have followed the uprising in Tunisia might be considered as necessary consequences that were largely predictable. However, from such a retrospective awareness the contingency of history gets lost. Angrist's argument was accurate at a very particular point of time and symbolizes an alternative that might have come into being just as well as what finally happened.

Correspondingly, the value of Polybius' *Histories* is to be a record of the past that embodies both a description of events which took place, and also allusions to what might have taken place. Admittedly, it seems as if counterfactuals were not Polybius' first concern when he wrote history, but, as this paper shows, rather a consequence both of his *paideia*-objective and his inclination towards the *paradoxon*/*paralogon* in history. Yet we should not ignore his counterfactual remarks: they are a prominent component of Polybius' historiography, as they often challenge the historical course of events. Such being the case and in contrast to what he has always been accused of, Polybius proves not to be a backward-looking prophet. Instead, he is a forward-looking narrator, writing about the past from the standpoint of his own day.

Notes

¹ I would like to thank Anton Powell, Kai Brodersen and Ulrich Gotter for many very helpful comments.

² Michelle Angrist: 'Morning in Tunisia', *Foreign Affairs* 16th January 2011.

³ Lynch 2011.

⁴ See Danto 1965. Cf. also Straub 2001, 29.

⁵ Schlegel 1974 [1802], 176.

⁶ On the one hand, 'real' factors like Rome's battle tactics are claimed to have brought about what actually happened, cf. 18.28–32 and 4.8.10–1; on the other, a divine entity seems to be made responsible (history as a course of events according to the plan of *tychē*, cf. 1.4). Lisa Hau touches on this problem at the outset of her article in this volume and refers to the difficulty of how we should deal with such comments uttered by Polybius.

⁷ Cf. Reinhardt 1960, 136 and 168: on Polybius' considering the whole of history as pointing towards one certain target 'mit seinem Gedanken von der Konvergenz des ökumenischen Geschehens in der Richtung auf Roms Weltherrschaft'. Momigliano 1977a, 12: 'Supporters of the cyclical view in Greek historiography must really fall back on Polybius.' Trompf 1979, 64 refers to the whole text of the *Histories*, when he says: 'Simple cyclical models were frequently presupposed in his interpretations.' Champion 2000, 429 speaks of 'prime determinants that formed the characteristics of peoples and their behaviour'. Further examples in Petzold (1999), 253, who states: 'Als Beispiel für eine "kyklische" antike Geschichtsauffassung, die im Gegensatz zu der christlichen Vorstellung vom linearen, einmaligen und einheitlichen Weltgeschichtsablauf von der Schöpfung bis zum letzten Gericht und der daraus abgeleiteten modernen entwicklungsgeschichtlichen Denkweise stehe, wird neben Herodot vor allem Polybios angeführt.' Henderson 2001, 38: 'The world he was born into became the preparatory background within his story, as he looked back from the perspective of the final superpower's HQ, and reviewed his obsolete Achaean vista – with the unimaginable hindsight of a post-Macedonian teleology.' Walbank 2002, 193: 'But in the case of Rome's rise to power he seems, exceptionally, to have invested the process with a teleological character' and (earlier: Walbank 1972, 64): 'Polybius has confused

what has happened with what was destined to happen and so invested the rise of Rome to world domination with a teleological character'. See also Clarke 1999, 88 with remarks on Polybius' 'environmental' determinism.

⁸ Cf. Rood 2007, 180. Momigliano 1977b, 169 was puzzled by this problem: 'When he came to historical narrative, he forgot cycles.' See also Momigliano 1977a, 189: 'But the main consideration is that outside the constitutional chapters, in the rest of his history, Polybius operates as if he did not hold any cyclical view of history.'

⁹ It seems as if Dionysius' comment (on Polybius' being an author 'whom no one can bear to read', *De Comp.* 4) has had a huge impact on modern scholars. In contrast, Herodotus and Thucydides have attracted far more attention with respect to the narratological aspects of their texts, see Rusten and Hamilton 2011, Grethlein 2010a, Grethlein 2010b, Grethlein 2010c, Tsagalis 2009, Grethlein 2009, Schwinge 2008, Baragwanath 2008, Heitsch 2007, Bassi 2007, Dominick 2007, Scardino 2007, Rood 2007b, Rood 2007c, to name but a few from recent years. For rare narratological approaches to Polybius, see Rood 2007a, Miltisios 2009, and Hau 2011.

¹⁰ It is mainly Homer whose work has been examined for counterfactual thoughts, see Nesselrath 1992 and Jong 1987. Further aspects in Lang 1989, Morrison 1992, Loudon 1993. As to the famous counterfactual thought in Hdt. 7.139.3 (if Athens had lost against Persia), see Demandt 1987 and Kleinknecht 1940, also Baragwanath in this volume; with regard to counterfactuals in Thucydides e.g. Flory 1988 or Solmsen 1975, 225–40.

¹¹ The first part being similar to Lisa Hau's approach to Thucydides ('explicit mention of potentially different outcome, or counterfactual statements'), the second adding another way of looking at how historians bring about virtual history in their narrative.

¹² See Smyth 1984, 518–22.

¹³ By refraining from constructing long fictional chains of possible outcomes, Polybius avoids making his report a mere field of speculation (what writing counterfactual history was always blamed for, see Ferguson 1998, 4–20).

¹⁴ Maier 2012, 152–156. Note that this was not foreseeable, although Polybius hinted at the Carthaginians' committing a fatal mistake that could have been avoided.

¹⁵ Cf. 1.20, where Polybius leaves no doubt that Rome's taking to the sea was the most crucial decision during the First Punic War (see also 1.63).

¹⁶ Walbank 1957, 75 gives voice to his concern that 'the present incident is usually regarded as legendary' and that the Romans must already have possessed plans of ships from Syracuse and Tarentum at that time. But it is precisely this objection against the value of the episode, which increases the significance of the unreal conditional. There is no point in seeking to discover whether this account was true or not. As Polybius deliberately pointed to how the Romans came by their knowledge of naval warfare, it is obvious that he wanted to reinforce the contrast between what happened and what might have happened.

¹⁷ Lang 1989, 6 draws attention to the fact that unreal conditionals have a stronger effect if the first assumption is expressed by 'if not' instead of 'if'.

¹⁸ This fits in with the definition Luhmann gives for contingency. See Luhmann 2002, 152, for whom contingency describes 'was weder notwendig ist noch unmöglich ist; was also so, wie es ist (war, sein wird), sein kann, aber auch anders möglich ist.'

¹⁹ See pp. 71–2.

²⁰ Morson 1994, 119.

²¹ Demandt 2001, 16–23. See also Ferguson 1998 with his groundbreaking introduction to the book *Virtual History*. Recent scholarship attaches more and more importance to the idea of counterfactual thoughts, cf. for example Tellenbach 1994, Olson, Roese and Deibert 1996, Tetlok and Belkin 1996, Cowley 1999, Bulhof 1999, Squire 1999, Brodersen 2000, Rosenstein 2005, and many other articles published in recent volumes of the journal *History & Theory*.

²² See Ziegler 1952, 1524–7, Pédech 1964, 259–76, Wooten 1974, Marincola 2007, 123–7, Scardino 2007, 754–65.

²³ Polybius also mentions the bad physical state of both the troops and the horses, and – like Scipio – notes the topographical difficulties the Carthaginians have to face.

²⁴ Both speeches are likely to have been made between 210 and 207 BC, cf. Lehmann 1967, 35 and Walbank 1967, 163. In this assembly, the Aetolian delegation led by Kleonikos and Chlaineas succeeded in prompting Sparta to join the Roman-Aitolian alliance.

²⁵ Cf. Pavel 1993.

²⁶ See also Miltsios 2009, 493.

²⁷ According to Polybius, for nearly every event in history causes may be found *e posteriori*, but that does not prompt him to assume a predictable structure for the past.

²⁸ Morson 1994, 159. Morson refers mostly to novels written before the middle of the 19th century. In his view, it was particularly Dostoevsky and Tolstoy who paved the way for new approaches to reality, leading to unconventional narratives that dealt with ‘unstructured plots’ to undermine the problem sketched by Morson.

²⁹ Once more, it is not my intention to suggest that Polybius established a theoretical concept and then applied it consistently in his writing of the past. Rather, he made use of different methods of bringing out the contingent character of history. I have referred to Morson’s term only to have a precise notion for a complex observation without intending to attribute all its implications to Polybius.

³⁰ Cf. 1.35.9–10, 1.65.7, 3.118.11, 11.19a, 12.25b.1–3.

³¹ See Demandt 2001, 26: ‘Ohne kontrafaktische Geschichte nehmen wir uns die Möglichkeit, die historischen Protagonisten dafür zu kritisieren. Wenn wir jemanden für eine Handlung verantwortlich machen, setzen wir voraus, dass er Alternativen hatte.’

³² Olson 1996, 298.

³³ The most prominent expression is certainly Polybius’ description of the past as *παράδοξον θεώρημα* (1.1.2). But there is also implicit evidence for Polybius’ attraction to the unpredictable character of the past: describing Molon’s campaign in Asia, Polybius goes into great detail on Molon’s encounter with Xenoiphas. This battle turned out to be an unstable situation with no calculable result. In sharp contrast, Polybius treats Molon’s undoubted victories against all other (and sometimes more threatening) opponents with just a brief comment – thus laying emphasis on the unexpected.

³⁴ Particularly unexpected events could be seen as the work of *tychē*, as a divine intervention, which could not be explained by real factors, but only by the interference of a supernatural entity.

³⁵ 1.1.5, 1.3.10, 6.2.3.

³⁶ In 36, 17, we see that Polybius makes no difference between ὁ θεός, οἱ θεοί, τὸ θεῖον and ἡ τύχη, see Hau 2011, 187. Moreover, note that his mention of *tychē* in 1, 4 is a quotation of Demetrios of Phaleron, see Maier 2011, 242.

³⁷ Hau 2011, 193. See also Maier 2012, 210–47, where I show that *tychē* does not represent a substantial historical factor within Polybius, but is rather a narrative conception to bring out different perspectives to analyze historical causation.

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ANTICIPATING OCTAVIAN'S FAILURE: FROM TAUROMENIUM TO THE DEATH OF CLEOPATRA

Anton Powell

To insist on a certain vagueness in the writing of history may have precise, even surprising, consequences. Aristotle wrote that it was the mark of an educated person to look only for 'that degree of precision which corresponds with the type of subject matter', observing implicitly that others had looked for too much (*NE* 1094a). Writers on the Roman Revolution commonly, I suggest, commit this error. I mean both historians and biographers writing in Antiquity, and modern scholars who draw on them and may in the process multiply the fault. The main field of vagueness and precision with which this chapter is concerned is, predictions made by the Roman people and their leaders in the 30s BC about the outcome of contemporary civil strife.

We shall here be particularly interested in predictions, firm or otherwise, which may be neglected by writers ancient and modern because they apparently 'came to nothing'. By observing what have been called 'lost intensities of hope and fear', much may be gained, for the understanding not only of mentalities for their own sake but also of political events, including some which have been long studied. The cognitive practice here commended is not new: it has been applied *to some extent* by historians from Antiquity onwards. (The seldom-admired Cassius Dio may emerge as surprisingly good in this area.) Rather, it is contended here that this approach may profitably be applied far more often than is yet normal. Retrospect is commonly abused in research, in that it tends to exclude much of importance as the historian seeks to show the inevitability, and very often the predictability for contemporaries, of what we now know to have happened. Frequently, one form of retrospect may exclude another: in seeking to understand grand themes, such as the transition from Roman Republic to Principate, interestingly-documented lesser themes are neglected because seemingly irrelevant to, a distraction from, or even subversive of, the privileged grander narrative. It will be suggested that we

may generate results both novel and authentic by training ourselves to approach historical events not only retrospectively but *prospectively*, by always seeking to ask, 'What could historical agents expect at this point, deprived of our own retrospective knowledge of what would ensue?'.

Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.31) describes the reasons why the Iceni of Britain attacked the Romans, during the reign of Nero. After enduring at Roman hands flogging, rape and seizure of property, the Iceni took up arms 'because of this humiliating insult *et metu graviorum*': the fear of worse. Worse, unspecified, but the Iceni were surely justified in their imprecision. Their vague fears, through inducing their revolt, both shaped material history and postponed the moment when Roman oppression would engulf them. This obscure provincial case may in fact point to a universal. All purposive acts are, in a sense, undertaken to prevent something. And there are several biases operating to exclude the historian from access to the negative aspects of motivation, of which the vagueness of certain fears is only one. The fear of a historical agent may on occasion be too humiliating for that person to admit publicly. Thus if we believe that Queen Cleopatra VII, after her defeat by Octavian, really did insist 'I shall *not* be led in a triumph' (ὁὐ θριαμβεύσομαι, cf. *Plut. Ant.* 84.2–3, *Dio* 51.13.1–2), we should concede that it probably was in private, that is, before few potential witnesses.¹ Very often, a motivating fear will be too dangerous for a political agent to admit: a politician contemplating the chances of electoral defeat would be such a case. Honest statements of fear can be self-fulfilling, and thus liable to be restrained or repressed by the persons concerned. Influential fears may also be muted for another reason, that they reflect embarrassingly on eminent individuals who share them. In Europe at the time of writing, leaders may perhaps hesitate to evoke fears of German influence within the European Union, because feeling vulnerable to the charge that they themselves, or their associates and predecessors, helped to create the structure responsible for such fears. Similarly, if Octavian feared seeing himself compromised in Roman eyes by his dealings with the eminently-Caesarian Cleopatra, he is unlikely to have described openly, accessibly to the historian, his own vulnerability as a Caesarian in the matter. As events played out, Octavian did succeed, it seems, in dissociating himself utterly from Cleopatra. So through his politic discretion, his *suppressio veri* (if such truth there was), we may more easily miss both efforts on his part to dissociate himself from the queen, and also the public opinion which had made him nervous in the first place.

Where a historical agent works to avoid a particular outcome, such as his own assassination, if he succeeds, the event in question will by definition not occur. Our ancient sources may not dwell for long on steps taken by

Octavian to avoid the fate of Julius Caesar. But we may be almost certain that the matter was for Octavian himself a source of enduring interest and activity. Dio has a brief but interesting report of the Princeps' use 'often' of a hidden breastplate, including while in the Senate (54.12.3). Suetonius reports that Augustus regularly managed to secure early information about conspiracies (*DA* 19.1).² From Antiquity to the present, values which might nowadays be described as journalistic have influenced what is recorded and explained. Change, and especially change involving great violence, is what writers tend to prefer explaining. Survival, continuity, are commonly not conceived as quite so worthy of attention, scholarly or pedagogic: we suspect that much more has been written and taught on the subject of why Caesar was assassinated than on the hardly less important question of why Augustus was not. So that if we study history to explain what *did* occur in a journalistic sense, and discriminate against actions which apparently 'led nowhere', 'came to nothing', we may be darkening our vision of rather a large proportion of politics. By operating with a mentality radically different from that of the agents we seek to understand, we may reduce our chances of achieving insight into their action, even if 'action' is conceived traditionally, that is narrowly and journalistically.

Sometimes contemporary expectations of grand and violent change are explicit in our sources without having evoked much modern scholarly interest, because those expectations, although widespread and well-founded, were not fulfilled. Such is the case with the Athenians' fear in 404 that their city would shortly be annihilated by Sparta. Yet if we examine how realistic those fears were, we may understand both that Sparta took a rather interesting set of conscious decisions in 404–3 and also that Athens had persuasive reasons to remain fearful of Sparta over a long period to come.³ Similarly in a modern case: who now, with hindsight, is interested in reports that the British government feared, at the height of World War II, an imminent Communist insurrection within Britain: that it feared penetration, if not complete subversion, by an Eastern power? Yet such official fears there were. Naturally they were not publicised. But they explain not merely the restrictions placed on guerrilla training given at the period to the Home Guard, but also – in part – the founding of the National Health Service a few years later, at a time when the ideals of the Soviet Union were still judged dangerously appealing. For Roman history, few have been interested in the idea that, from the late 40s to the early 20s, there may have been widespread fear that Rome would be permanently degraded in favour of the Greek East, and particularly of Alexandria, cultures which had already penetrated the Roman elite far more thoroughly than the Soviet Union had, by the 1940s, influenced the population, elite

or poor, of Britain. We shall return to this, a possibly lost fear with enduring consequences.

By seeking to identify the unfulfilled expectations of agents in Antiquity we may widen the field of topics appealing for investigation. The explosions of popular relief, and hopes of peace, which greeted both the Treaty of Misenum in 39 and Agrippa's victory at Naulochus in 36 are described graphically and with emphasis by Appian (*BC* 5.74; 130, 132) and Dio (48.37; 49.15). Normally, however, these moments have not greatly interested modern scholars.⁴ The popular optimism now seems, after all, misplaced; it 'led nowhere' in the great retrospective syllabus. Civil war had not ended. Scholars lose thereby, even for their favoured project of tracing the rise of the Augustan regime: they lose evidence as to how excitedly but also how sceptically the result of Actium might be received. Huge efforts remained for Octavian to make after that battle, not only to reassure by symbolic behaviour, but also to repress remaining sources of potential resistance which might intensify and exploit enduring scepticism both in the short and the longer term. For the short term, let us remember that both Cleopatra and Antony escaped from Actium, with a fleet, and with far better prospects than those with which Sextus Pompeius had earlier escaped the Pompeian débâcle at Munda, or than those with which Octavian had fled in a small boat from his humiliation at the battle of Tauromenium.

For reconstructing the predictive mentality of Romans from the 40s to the 20s, it helps to view synoptically the forms of security they lost in that period. Tribunician intervention could no longer be relied on to protect the common citizen. Julius Caesar on his way into the Roman treasury had simply disregarded an obstructive tribune (Dio 41.17.2); another serving tribune, Salvius, was proscribed and beheaded at the triumvirs' order (App. *BC* 4.17). A legal system no longer protected citizens from arbitrary and sudden death: the massacres most call 'proscriptions' induced fear in the wealthy which surely far outlasted the period of the killings. Land-ownership was no longer safe; the triumvirs had reassigned much of Italy without compensation. The food supply to Rome had been reduced, by Sextus' blockade, to the point where the poor were suffering 'to the extreme' (ἐσχάτον: App. *BC* 5.74). That Greek word may be significantly and emolliently abstract: as to how many died from the famine, Caesarian and Pompeian sources alike may share an interest in hiding the worst, concrete, reality. For Octavian, the famine reflected his impotence at sea; for Republicans the famine was a failure in their plan to conduct – in Kathryn Welch's phrase (2012, 26) – an 'ethical civil war'. And who could count on the safe restoration, one day, of an undivided empire and

unimpeded trade? Here, if ever, was a period when people might sensibly, and vaguely, fear 'something worse'.

With hindsight, and tracing the establishment of the Augustan regime, scholars have saluted Octavian-Augustus for his political acumen, from his earliest years in politics. Even Geoffrey de Ste. Croix could write that Augustus had 'political genius', and was 'one of the ablest political figures known to human history'.⁵ But I wish to argue that, in the 40s and 30s, what Romans could expect from Octavian was not manifestations of genius, but horror, all the more frightening for being unpredictable in form, and thus harder to guard against. I have dealt elsewhere⁶ with what Suetonius called the 'blazing and many-sided unpopularity' of the young Octavian: *multiplici flagravat infamia* (Suet. *DA* 27.3). Here it is important to acknowledge the vagueness reported by Dio (48.3). In 42, after Philippi, Octavian was ill and slow to return to Rome. However, 'they (sc. the people in Rome) thought that he was delaying not so much from illness as because he was preparing something nasty (κακοῦ τινοῦς), and consequently they suspected the coming of every possible harm to themselves' (πάνθ' ὅσα ἐνεδέχeto σφας παθεῖν ὑπετόπουν). The deliberately vague phrase κακόν τι is used again later in the chapter. We see why Dio, and perhaps his source, insisted on it: the vagueness entails the huge logical scope of contemporary fears. 'Every form of harm' was considered. Well might the loathing of the populace be called 'many-sided', *multiplex*. Now, it is a quality of the successful politician to convince his or her public that (s)he will *not* do certain things: thus in our own day politicians deemed of the Left and Right commonly seek before elections to reassure, respectively, that they will not increase taxes and cut public services. The sheer vagueness, the generality, of the dread which Octavian engendered is a measure of his failure, of his incapacity to anticipate and restrict opposition.

The significance of Tauromenium

Modern hindsight as to young Octavian's *prospective* actions is inspired above all by Actium, and involves, as we have seen, sweeping aside the warnings implicit in ancient accounts of earlier promising moments, Misenum and Naulochus. Peter Brunt wrote (1971, 112), 'security was not assured until Actium'. We note the preposition: not 'before' but 'until'. Actium, it is suggested, brought security. Now, on another occasion one might investigate how far, and with what effects, general dread – in particular of massacre and expropriation within Italy – persisted after Actium. But for the present chapter we shall try two different viewpoints for our own retrospect, and for our attempts at prospective reconstruction. The first is, the battle of Tauromenium. Some may wonder which battle

that was. After all, unlike those other battle sites, Philippi, Naulochus and Actium, Tauromenium is treated very briefly in standard accounts of the period.⁷ It is sometimes given less than a sentence. And unlike the other three battles just named, it does not occur *suo loco* in the index to Syme's *Roman Revolution*. It may seem to have led nowhere. So why dwell on it now?

Tauromenium, in 36, was Octavian's final defeat as commander in person. It occurred shortly before Agrippa's decisive victory over Pompeian and Republican forces at Naulochus. At Tauromenium, Octavian failed to anticipate the movements at sea of his enemy, Sextus Pompeius. He was entirely outmanoeuvred and he reacted – as he had during the first engagement at Philippi – by abandoning his troops and hiding. Indeed, this time he fled the entire scene, in a succession of small boats. The nature of this personal failure, as a strategist and soldier, is not disputed in our sources. By far the fullest account is in Appian (*BC* 5.110–112), and it is so sympathetic to Octavian, so *centred* on Octavian, his compensatory qualities and his divine good fortune (Appian says a god helped him to escape from Tauromenium: *BC* 5.112), as to suggest that Appian was drawing here on Octavian's own memoirs, as he says that he did elsewhere, when describing Octavian's similar performance at the first battle of Philippi.⁸ If Octavian, or rather Augustus by time he wrote, did not dispute the thoroughness of his defeat at Tauromenium, and his extraordinary fortune in avoiding capture, we can be fairly sure of how close he came to losing – everything: quite likely his life, certainly the civil war. Now, the difference between Octavian's survival and extinction at this moment cannot be confidently explained, his survival cannot be 'retrodicted', by any of the general factors by which modern historians explain his rise. So why should one not try to explain this event, this equipoise of failure and success, as diligently as one seeks to account for Octavian's successes culminating in Actium?

We cannot prove, but still I suggest, that if Octavian had ended his career at Tauromenium, historians would have perceived earlier events differently. I do not say that they would have understood events more comprehensively; rather, that they would have made a different selection of things to understand. What might they have – realistically – found? Instead of downplaying Tauromenium as irrelevant (or as pedagogically obstructive) to one privileged pattern, the rise of Octavian-Augustus, they would have sought instead to create a different pattern into which the battle fitted well. They would have looked for earlier military failure by Octavian; they would have written more extensively about humiliating aspects of First Philippi and about the series of failures at sea against Sextus Pompeius. This would have led them to study the wider question of

Caesarian as against Pompeian, Republican, competence in naval matters, as Welch indeed now has done (2012, *passim*).

Studying Octavian's military failings, culminating at Tauromenium, would have opened further grand dossiers for research, which now remain neglected. What of the morale of Octavian's fighting men, led by this youthful incompetent with a record of deserting his troops? Did the vast, still partly mysterious, series of sea-raid shelters at Cumae, at the Portus Iulius, act unintendedly as a depressing monument to Republican, Pompeian, naval superiority?⁹ Indeed, a study of the battle of Tauromenium might very quickly have suggested that Octavian's men failed there in part because they knew what sort of commander they had. That thought in turn would have encouraged study of Octavian's wider unpopularity among Romans. Both that unpopularity and the military incompetence should have suggested something else that historians too seldom examine: that Octavian's legitimacy as heir to Caesar was surely contested in popular opinion far more often than our sources let us see. Julius Caesar had shown *clementia* to civil opponents; Octavian and his fellow triumvirs were so conscious of the contrast between that quality and their own massacre, that they explicitly defended the 'proscriptions' in those terms (App. *BC* 4.8). Julius Caesar's *clementia* had been fatally abused, they said. Something very different was needed. But no less impressive was the gulf in military quality. Julius Caesar had been, perhaps, uniquely successful as a general, according to Roman opinion. Octavian, even before Tauromenium, was near the opposite extreme. After deserting his troops a second time he was *at* that extreme. In what sense could the worst be the son of the best, for a society which stressed continuity of moral character within a *gens*? In regard to such continuity, how tenuous was posthumous adoption? The military and non-military aspects of Octavian's negative record would, indeed, interact in the minds of the many Romans who, in varying degrees, believed that in the main bad behaviour was divinely requited with a bad end; that, for example, worldly (*in*)*felicitas* was a function of (*im*)*pietas*.¹⁰ The connection between Octavian's level of success and his personal morality would, decades later, still be tellingly asserted by the loyalist Velleius (2.87): *Fuit...et fortuna et clementia Caesaris dignum*, 'There was in his good fortune and his clemency, something worthy of (a) Caesar'. It is significant that Velleius should have picked out, and associated, these two qualities; one sees how problematic fact can generate idealising claim. (Compare the way that the site of the guillotine was later named 'Place de la Concorde'.) What, in 36, could be *expected* of such a man as Octavian? Not only that he was quite likely to fail disastrously and decisively, but that he was, for the same reasons, failing already. Now, given

that the ultimate success of Octavian-Augustus is properly one of the most imposing themes of all historiography, we may understand that even so striking and demonstrable a theme as his early failures, military and diplomatic, may prove unable to withstand the pressures of modern hindsight, pressures to ignore or minimise inconvenient evidence from sources much closer to the events.

The helpful cliché says, history is the propaganda of the winning side. But the saying needs to be refined. The winning side commonly has quite a lot to say about the *actions* of the losing side; historians thus commonly have a lot to work on. But while concrete actions of the losing side may long survive in the official record, albeit discoloured, distorted, and grossly incomplete, the propaganda of the losing side disappears far more thoroughly. We all still know quite a lot about certain actions of Imperial Japan and the Third Reich. But far less survives of their propaganda. How many today have heard of the ‘Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere’, or of Goebbels’ persistent claims about ‘Western Plutocracies’? Because efficient propaganda plays to widespread attitudes, its value as evidence may be capital. In some ways Revolutionary Rome, for the historian, is – or rather could be – a benign exception in the matter of propaganda perishing: coinage from the losers survives abundantly, and the ideals it propagated are a wonderful, because contemporary, guide to mentalities, especially when we practise to read those ideals as implicit criticism of what opponents represented.¹¹ In Antiquity, as today, the effects of hindsight begin almost immediately after the event. Augustan retrospective literature on the revolutionary period largely effaced dissident literary voices (though see Welch 2009): but coinage from the age of revolution could not be thus overwhelmed. As with the subversive images of luxury, surviving on sixth-century vases made on Spartan territory, subsequent political correctness – of austere classical Sparta as of Augustan Rome – simply could not destroy enough of the evidence. That our own scholarly and pedagogic tradition has, with distinguished exceptions, studied coins so little as compared with literature is one main reason why the rise of Octavian-Augustus has been so subject to modern hindsight. If we were exposed more often to the countless surviving expressions on metal of contemporary Roman hopes of overthrowing Octavian, we might better understand not only the extent of his early failings but also the extraordinary nature of his eventual achievement.

In contrast, then, to political messages on coinage, propaganda of the day – oral or on papyrus – perished far more thoroughly; *scripta non manent*, except for a few cases. One such case concerns Antony, and his promotion in the late 30s of Caesarion, ‘Ptolemy and Caesar’. Dio writes that Antony’s

motive was 'to slander Caesar Octavian, because he was an adopted son of Julius Caesar and not [sc. unlike Caesarion] a true and legitimate one' (ποιητὸς ἄλλ' οὐ γνήσιος, 49.41.2). I suggest that this fragment of propaganda may represent a lost reality of popular thinking, and that Octavian's legitimacy was all the more called into question on the cognitive principle of the instructive contrast. Octavian's chief opponent, Sextus Pompeius, was believed a true son of Rome's other recent hero, his physical legitimacy uncontested, and his continuity with his father in naval matters deeply persuasive. That, surely, is why Sextus' moral continuity *was* contested, with claims from Augustan and later writers that Sextus betrayed his father's legacy: whereas Pompey the Great had suppressed piracy, Sextus promoted pirates, indeed *was* a pirate. In a later formulation, he was 'an unworthy offspring of his father Magnus...as a Sicilian pirate he polluted [his father's] naval triumphs' (...*Magno proles indigna parente...polluit aequoreos Siculus pirata triumphos*, Lucan 6.420–22).¹² This set of anti-Sextan claims was generally unpersuasive in the 40s and 30s; that it was nevertheless made may be a ricochet of a far more persuasive and damaging argument which went in the other direction. If moral discontinuity was so tenacious a theme applied to Sextus, how tempting and effective is it likely to have been when applied to the militarily abject Octavian? We have, I suggest, what should be a textbook case: of propaganda surviving from the winning side which, in its day, was merely a feeble ripost to a far more persuasive contention – a contention, a mentality, now almost entirely lost.

Actium and its aftermath

So far I have tried to sketch a reconstruction of attitudes before Nauclochus, by the device of subtracting information only available after September 36. My remaining argument extends further forward in time. Now we should extend our view to the end of the 30s. And in this case I propose to discount in particular our knowledge, from hindsight, that Rome would remain the capital of the empire.

There are two episodes from this period which our sources, followed by modern historians, have understandably treated as set pieces, decisive for the grand narrative of Roman history: the battle of Actium and the death of Cleopatra. (The narrative of the death of Antony is significantly overshadowed by that concerning his consort, even in Plutarch's biography which has Antony as its formal subject.) Both for Actium and Cleopatra's death, historians have scrupulously emphasised the obscurity of the subject matter, resulting from insufficiencies in our sources.¹³ But scruple over method has not prevented elaborate reconstruction. Of the two episodes, Cleopatra's death seems to have yielded the clearer modern picture,

through the availability of more coherent ancient narratives. This fact alone should put us on our guard, since the battle of Actium took place in view of vastly more witnesses than those who may have existed for the private, indeed guarded, circumstances in which we read that most of Cleopatra's last days played out. If we seem to know more about the queen's chamber than about the public arena of Actium, it may be not in spite of the shortage of witnesses for the former, but *because* of it. We may, in short, have passed abruptly from an age of prolific and contradictory source material, that of late Republican Rome, to an epoch more resembling the Hellenistic world, in which authors who might embarrass a ruler's account of events proceeded at their peril. From the divided Senate of 32, informed by Antony's aggressive effusions against Octavian as well as by the latter's propaganda, we move abruptly, first to a moment at which there existed two Senates (Dio 50.3.2), one at Rome and one in the East, each consisting of partisans and no doubt largely of courtiers of their chosen dynast, to a state which did endure: a single Senate under a single ruler with something like a single truth to accept about recent history. It may be that historians of the modern era have not always adjusted accordingly their expectations of the source material, but have written as if Republican relative openness survived into the era of Actium and of Cleopatra's downfall. In dealing with these two very different periods, pre- and post 32, involving evident continuities but also brutal change with regard to source material, there may be a special value in proceeding *prospectively*: that is, in seeking to reconstruct the expectations of Romans in the second period, and the events which flowed from them, in the light of information generated in the first, more accessible, period. Here our concern will be not with the shadowy or (in poetry) fantastic narratives of Actium, but with the apparently better-lit end of the Ptolemaic dynasty.

For the historian today seeking to reconstruct Octavian's procedure in Egypt during the year 30, there is a potent difficulty in addition to hindsight: distraction. The sheer mass of eminently dramatic detail on the fall of a seductive queen is near irresistible as a source of extended narrative and discussion. How much precision does the subject matter here allow? Did Cleopatra, for example, die from snakebite? There has even been debate as to how many cobras would have been needed to supply enough venom to kill three women, the queen and her two attendants (Griffiths 1961, 113–18, and bibliography at Gurval 1995, 29 n. 17; Whitehorne 1994, 192 is properly ironical). Certainly, the theory of suicide by snakebite has potent backing, in recent as in ancient times. So, for example, Syme (1939), 299; in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* of 1996 Dorothy Thompson wrote 'She died at her own hand (and the bite of a royal asp)'. Christopher Pelling

has observed correctly that 'The story of her death...is very hard to estimate' but tends to accept at least the outline of the ancient account(s), according to which Octavian allowed Cleopatra to stay alive for 9 days after the death of Antony, indeed tried to keep her alive to adorn his triumph, but was thwarted by her suicide. From 'the story we have', 'No one could escape the inference that he was trying to keep her alive against her will, but was outwitted. Octavian was usually a more accomplished propagandist than this.' (*CAH*² 1996, vol.10, 64f.) Let us admit that the verdict of these scholars may well be correct. Pelling implies, interestingly and surely rightly, that for us a main, if not the chief, criterion should be, how far the general story suited Octavian: if it was unhelpful to him, it is far more likely to be true than if it served his cause. This shows a proper wariness of the possibility that the *Principes* might wish to impose a grand lie, and of the fact that he, more than anyone else, was in a position to do so, even though Pelling judges that this particular story is unlikely to be mendacious. However, if we try to understand Octavian *prospectively*, on the basis of accounts from the era before 31, we may perhaps reach a different view of what it suited him to say about the queen's death.

Of our two narrative sources, Plutarch and Dio, the latter has been rightly seen as the more inclined to give details plainly pro-Octavianic in tendency (e.g. R. Sablayrolles in Hartog *et al.* 2001, 1738 n. 370; cf. Pelling 1988, 261), but the areas of convergence between the two writers remain impressive. Both authors claim to know a remarkable amount about the famous interview between Octavian and the captive Cleopatra. Plutarch (*Ant.* 83) portrays the queen as in poor shape, physically and in morale, yet still able to scold and beat a slave who reveals to Octavian that she is withholding some of her treasure. Dio, in contrast, has her seductive and gracefully manipulative in her mourning attire (51.12), deploying to sway Octavian symbols of her earlier love affair with his adoptive father, Julius Caesar, including Caesar's letters, clutched to her bosom. Dio records that Octavian had himself approached the queen (earlier, while she was still out of his reach) with diplomatic advances suggesting that he too was in love (ἐρῶν) with her (51.8.5–7; 9.5; Plut *Ant.* 73 writes similarly). Dio (51.12.5) stresses the self-control with which Octavian, during the interview, withstood the temptation to gaze at the alluring spectacle Cleopatra presented. (Florus wrote that 'her beauty was no match for the chastity of the *princeps*': 2.21.9–10.) Plutarch and Dio agree that Octavian intended to deceive the queen (*Ant.* 83.5; Dio 51.11.6), Plutarch is explicit that finally he was the one deceived. Both authors, in recording Octavian's earlier erotic diplomacy, effectively refer to deceit, in that subsequently, once Cleopatra was in his power, he is described as refusing any amorous

dealing. Both authors maintain that Octavian tried to keep the queen alive in spite of herself (Plut. *Ant.* 79.2–3; 82.2; Dio 51.11; 14.3), both narrate the story of snake-bite: both, significantly, are agnostic about its truth while suggesting that she may have employed a different poison (Plut. *Ant.* 85f.; Dio 51.14). Both believe in her suicide. Neither lets us see clearly what source(s) they depended upon for these events which were, for each, remote in time, although Plutarch (*Ant.* 82.2) refers to the testimony of one Olympos, Cleopatra's doctor at the end of her life. The latter reportedly was complicit in the queen's attempts at suicide and later published an account of the events. Nothing more seems to be known of this man. However, since he was of standing to attend the queen in 30, probably he was then a person of demonstrated success; that is, of some age, and thus likely to have composed his memoir within Augustus' lifetime (which lasted for some 43 years after Cleopatra's death). We recall Tacitus' words about testimony from Alexandria in a later age and its relation to a Roman ruler (Vespasian) who might benefit from it: during that ruler's lifetime, he implies, such testimony might attract *mendacio pretium*, 'reward for lying' (*Hist.* 4.81). Inconvenient testimony, on the other hand, might be expected to incur punishment, in this most sensitive and jealously guarded of provinces. Olympos, it may be thought, had reason to think that Octavian approved the portrayal of Cleopatra as suicidal.

On the manner of the Queen's death, the evidence is surely conclusive as to which version Octavian-Augustus preferred. Under his reign Livy (*Per.* 133) records suicide, and the loyal Velleius (2.87.1) under the succeeding emperor suicide by snakebite. Strabo, in Augustus' time, mentions suicide by snakebite or poison (17.795c). At Octavian's triumph of 29 Cleopatra was shown in effigy with a snake attached to her arm (Plut. *Ant.* 86.3). Poets under the Augustan regime, indeed under Augustan patronage (through the intermediary of Maecenas), referred to her suicide by snakebite (Prop. 3.11.53–4; Hor. *Od.* 1.37.26–32; *Aen.* 8.697). Most impressive of all in this respect, though indirect, is the portrayal by Virgil of the death of Cleopatra's analogue, another North-African queen who had charmed a member of Octavian's family: Dido, seductress of the legendary founding Julian, Aeneas. She too enacts a dramatic suicide, one aimed aggressively at a Julian chief who has in the end proved intractably virtuous. And yet there is a structural problem for the theory of a suicidal Cleopatra, one applying to the accounts of both Plutarch and Dio: if Octavian was so keen to keep the queen alive, at least until she could be displayed in a triumph, why did he not put her under reliable guard instead of leaving her in privacy and with loyal helpers (Tarn, 1934, 109, drawing on Groag 1915, 57–68: both argue that Octavian in fact contrived her

death)? Octavian, we are told, knew – well before her death – that she was suicidal, and had been obliged to issue threats against her children as a means of manipulating her into staying alive (Plut. *Ant.* 82.2). It should be stressed that, according to both our main sources, the queen was imprisoned by Octavian's guard at the time of her death. It may be useful to see whether a different account of Octavian's motives and likely action may emerge if, rather than focusing on what is largely a regime-friendly narrative of an episode portrayed retrospectively as a closure, we look carefully at the prospects envisaged, before the queen's death, by Octavian and by the political audiences of soldiers and civilians which it was vital for him to address. Such prospects will indeed include much which did not – as we say – 'materialise'. But for historians some of those prospects deserve to have a certain appeal: the likelihood that they existed, in the minds of contemporaries, is greater than the chance that any particular detail of Cleopatra's recorded suicide is true. And such prospects were themselves material in that they will have engendered material acts.

Let us remember what may have emerged from a study of that earlier episode now almost effaced by hindsight, the battle of Tauromenium: that Octavian might lack legitimacy in the minds of many soldiers, especially in relation to Julius Caesar, to whose name he clung but to whose military prowess his own career formed a suggestive contrast. After Tauromenium, victory at Naulochus certainly modified Octavian's military reputation, but not perhaps sufficiently for the better. The acknowledged role of Agrippa as commander at Naulochus might even be taken to reflect that Octavian himself now effectively admitted his own military incapacity: that in war the new Caesar had despaired of emulating his 'father'. We know the tendency of some modern writers to imagine serene prospects from 31 onwards. A literary scholar has written, 'Augustus did not need propaganda. He had after Actium no rival...'.¹⁴ However, Dio, our only source of continuous narrative over the late 30s, records that *after* Actium Octavian faced dangerous unrest among Caesarian soldiers in Italy. Octavian is said to have feared what might happen if the discontented soldiers *found a leader* (51.4.2; cf. 51.3.2, 4–5). This is interesting testimony to his own standing – even an abstract person might be deemed a threat to whatever authority Octavian had. Once more, we find Dio realistically assigning importance to vague prospects: in addition to the abstract leader, he refers to Octavian's fearing 'something bad', τι κακόν, from the soldiery (51.4.2). Confirmatory, publicly visible, evidence of Octavian's difficulty seems to be reflected in the report that he was obliged to risk the dangerous voyage from Greece to Brundisium in winter so as to be on hand to reimpose his authority.¹⁵ His emergency measures, to calm the troops and also those

landowners whose properties might be forfeited in the process, involved making promises of vast funding. Yet the cupboard was almost bare (Dio 51.4.7): Octavian had revealed as much (and no doubt created further enemies) when imposing an emergency income tax of 25% on citizen landowners before Actium (Plut. *Ant.* 58.1; Dio 50.10.4–5). All might see that the prospect of realising his grand, post-Actium, promises depended on the treasure of the Ptolemies. Tarn may hardly have exaggerated when he described Octavian's situation: '...if he failed to secure the last great accumulation of wealth in the world, army, veterans, and landowners would all turn on him in earnest...'; 'He then returned to Asia, with the knowledge that his career and perhaps his life depended on securing the treasure.' (1934, 106–8) We should add that many might worry about what would be involved in seeking to lay hands on this fortune, even if they believed in its existence after Auletes' activities and Antony's years of lavish campaigning.¹⁶ We may be sure that Egypt could rapidly generate vast wealth, but that is with hindsight. How well informed on the point did most Romans think themselves, beforehand?

As Octavian prepared his descent on Alexandria, he might reflect that Romans might see several broadly-, vaguely-, defined outcomes as possible. He might indeed win a straightforward victory, eliminate Antony and the Ptolemaic leaders, and return with royal riches. Or, any grand treasure might elude him (plans by Cleopatra to destroy the royal treasure are mentioned by Plutarch, *Ant.* 74.2, and Dio 51.8.5–6; 11.2); Egypt might revolt behind Cleopatra and Antony and pose on a grand scale to Octavian the sort of dangers which the previously-victorious Julius Caesar had faced in Alexandria. Or, Romans might fear, Octavian's method of exploiting Egyptian treasure might reflect not the clean-cut patriotism of which, in the event, we read, but something akin to the hybrid methods used by those two earlier chiefs who had approached Cleopatra in the Julian cause: Caesar himself, and Antony.

Roman anticipations of Octavian's conduct in Egypt

Hellenisation, we know, was in the air.¹⁷ Bilingualism in the Roman aristocracy, rooted in long educational, or at least formative, stays in the Greek-speaking east, is as clear in stories concerning Julius Caesar as it is in Cicero's letters to 'Atticus' (in reality T. Pomponius Atticus, long resident in Attica and the future father-in-law of Agrippa). We are told that at emotional moments of his life, Caesar expressed himself in Greek. Before crossing the Rubicon, 'Let the dice be thrown' (Plut. *Pomp.* 60.2; *Caes.* 32.6); in defending his own autocracy (Cic. *De Offic.* 3.82 with 1.26; Suet. *DJ* 30.5); and his dying words to the assassin Brutus, καὶ σὺ, τέκνον;

(Suet. *DJ* 82.2). Now, we cannot know whether all (or any) of these reported utterances are historical. But what is firmly historical is, that the readership of these reports was expected to find it plausible that Caesar would speak in Greek, even at a time of mortal danger, if not in his death agony. Hardly a moment for affectation, for the *recherché*.¹⁸ At Caesar's death, Octavian was receiving his Greek education, east of the Adriatic at Apollonia (Suet. *DA* 8.2). And we shall come to that other leading Caesarian, Antony, in a moment.

Roman attitudes to this hellenisation in our period were complicated. The matter was far from being merely aesthetic or symbolic. It raised the question of Rome's government, even of the city's status as capital. Elizabeth Rawson (1975) helpfully examined Roman attitudes in our period to kingship in general; she found complexity. There were, she observed, many positive memories of Rome's own early kings, and a snobbish respect at times for kings of the recent past, or the present: that is, for hellenistic monarchs of the east. And here the prospect, the unclear but capital prospect, of the Julian house comes into play. Julius Caesar had as a young man spent so long at the court of king Nikomedes of Bithynia as to be himself labelled, by Romans, as 'the Queen of Bithynia'. This, Suetonius emphasised, went beyond a joke: it was 'a serious matter of reproach which lasted for years and exposed him to insults from all' (*DJ* 49; cf. Powell 2008, 165–6). Although the gravamen of this criticism was probably more sexual (and thus, according to Roman thinking, military) than political, one consequence may have been Caesar's own legislation which forbade citizens between 20 and 40 to spend more than 3 successive years outside Italy on private business, and senators' sons to go abroad at all on private business (Suet. *DJ* 42.1). When Caesar, at the end of his life, made – with Antony – a public gesture involving a diadem, symbol of hellenistic monarchy, he was advertising – whatever his motives – the fact that for many Romans the question of such kingship ruling Rome was, and would remain, important (App. *BC* 2.108–10). Rawson concluded: 'The glamour of kingship as practised in the East had dazzled the Romans, and then declined... Yet...[the idea of kingship] was still hated, and it was inevitable that...Caesar should be accused of wanting the title. Why should he have done so? It would have brought him...neither more absolute power nor more spectacular ceremony. ...It was, perhaps, in the final analysis, worth turning down.' (pp.158–9). I miss, in Rawson's subtle article, any reference to Caesar's possible gain from establishing a *hereditary* monarchy in his family. Would it not have been expected to affect his 'absolute power', especially as and when his health declined with age, if men predicted that his legacy would be protected by a successor from his own

family? Few things undermine authority as much as the prospect that its bearer will soon be gone, and his regime with him.

Again, Suetonius need not be accurate in his – circumstantial – report that a tribune (of 44), Helvius Cinna, told several people that Caesar had ordered him to bring forward, while he (Caesar) was absent, a bill to allow him to marry whichever women, and however many women, he liked, for the sake of producing legitimate children (*DJ* 52.3).¹⁹ But this report surely shows that the anticipation of royal hellenistic marital practices was current at Rome. In the same chapter, Suetonius stresses Caesar's love affairs with queens: with Eunoe the Moor, wife of Bogud, and with Cleopatra. Syme reacted dismissively, as more than once at moments of logical difficulty: 'Years before, Cleopatra was of no moment whatsoever in the policy of Caesar the Dictator, but merely a brief chapter in his amours, comparable to Eunoe the wife of the prince of Mauretania...' (1939, 275). Our source for the link with Eunoe, Suetonius (*DJ* 52.1), does indeed compare her with Cleopatra – but in such a way as to make clear the latter's preeminence for Caesar: *Dilexit et reginas, inter quas Eunoen...sed maxime Cleopatram*, 'but above all' Cleopatra. He brought the Queen of Egypt to Rome and, again according to Suetonius, allowed her to call the son she had by his name. Was 'Caesarion' really his son, as Cleopatra publicly claimed from near the time of his birth? 'The facts are beyond recovery', states the *OCD* (entry under 'Ptolemy XV Caesar').²⁰ But for us genetics is not the main point. That point, for Roman contemporaries and so properly for the historian, was predictive. By honouring, indeed by allowing, the stays of Cleopatra at Rome – the second of which he never brought to an end, because it lasted until his assassination – Caesar knowingly gave credence to the queen's claim about her son's paternity.²¹ So he did also by erecting a golden statue of Cleopatra at Rome, in his temple to Venus Genetrix. Appian (*BC* 2.102) states that the statue still stood, in his own day, where Caesar had placed it, alongside that of the goddess (Κλεοπάτρας τε εικόνα καλήν τῇ θεῷ παρεστήσατο, ἥ καὶ νῦν συνέστηκεν αὐτῇ). Dio, even later, records it as still visible in the temple of Venus (51.22.3). Moreover, Appian in this context makes clear that the temple was at the heart of Caesar's new forum, a place programmatic of the new constitution he planned for Rome. To locate, in a shrine celebrating his own lineage and Venus' standing as the mother of his ancestors, so politically conspicuous a tribute to another female of divine pretensions who herself claimed to be the mother of his own child, spectacularly reinforced Cleopatra's claim.²²

We recall the Roman way of seeing, often of advertising, moral continuity within a *gens*, continuity which might extend back over the whole

of Rome's history – and beyond, as the *Aeneid* would soon illustrate with its structural assimilation of Aeneas the Julian founder and Augustus the Julian re-founder. The purpose of that assimilation was itself predictive, to assert the prospect of Augustus' enduring success. And the *Aeneid* may also suggest, especially if we were right to see that text as somewhat forensically addressing and palliating weak points in Augustus' character and prospect,²³ how Caesar's complaisant treatment of Cleopatra created a problem for Octavian which lasted until the latter's fraught visit to Egypt in 30. It is a problem that the Cleopatra-metaphor, Dido, addresses in the poem written a few years later. She does so eminently in character: touchingly and poetically. She refers to her relation with the great Julian founder as a marriage (*Aen.* 4.172, cf. 324); the poet immediately makes clear his disapproval of the claim. She reminds Aeneas as he abandons her that she has no son by him. If only she had a *tiny* Aeneas (*parvulus...Aeneas*) to play in her palace, she would not seem so *captured* (*capta*, a word more fitting for Cleopatra than for Dido) and abandoned. But emphatically it is not to be (*Aen.* 4.327–30). Now, what historian today could be so brutally insensitive to literary *ethopoia* as to think here of contemporary Roman politics? But, what sensitive *littérateur* could be so wishfully blind to contemporary Roman allegorical habits as not to do so?²⁴ No marriage of Dido with Aeneas, no son for Dido by Aeneas: this implied, for Virgil's contemporaries, no marriage or son with Julius Caesar for her analogue Cleopatra. The assertion about Caesarion's nullity, that is, continued to be worth making for years after the death of Ptolemy-and-Caesar. (Nicolaus of Damascus may well have written, under Augustus, that Julius Caesar had repudiated 'Caesarion' in his will: F130.68.) With 'tiny Aeneas', so memorably denied by Virgil, we should compare the literal meaning of the Alexandrian Greek nickname by which Cleopatra's son was known: 'Caesarion' was a diminutive and so meant 'little Caesar'. To Romans, such diminutive forms of the patronym may even have seemed distinctively – that is, conspicuously – Alexandrian: compare the Alexandrian name *Antyllos*, 'little Antony', for Antony's son by Fulvia (e.g. Plut. *Ant.* 71.3, Dio 51.6.1).

After the youth's death, Caesar's Ptolemaic son might be authoritatively deemed not to have existed. But in the late 30s, deeming was not enough. At Rome, in Octavian's interest, a surviving friend of Julius Caesar, C. Oppius, published a book to deny the alleged paternity of Caesarion. Suetonius, a writer of some acumen in the matter of evaluating sources, commented: 'as if the matter was very much in need of authoritative rebuttal' (*quasi plane defensione ac patrocinio res egeret*). Oppius was strategically but awkwardly placed. For Antony, in his campaign to assert Caesarion's

paternity, had himself recently cited Oppius as a helpful witness: Oppius was supposed, as a friend of the late Caesar, to know that the latter had accepted the child as his own (Suet. *DJ* 52.2). Did the status which Julius Caesar had, implicitly at least, conferred on Caesarion reflect an ambition on the dictator's part to bury the Republic under a Caesarian dynasty? Soldiers and veterans of the Caesarian cause might be persuaded so. Might Caesarion succeed in establishing a royal house in the east, a house of 'Ptolemy and Caesar' as his official nomenclature in Egypt put it, with evident appeal both to Roman troops and to Egyptians? Ptolemy-and-Caesar was 17 years of age in the year 30; reports from 'several Greek writers' that he looked like Caesar in his features and in the way he walked (Suet. *DJ* 52.2), if they were of contemporary origin, may – in a world without photography – have had a widespread effect without necessarily being true. And, while we know that Caesarion represented a dead-end, for contemporaries he would be seen rather differently: he would very soon be of an age to father other descendants of Julius Caesar. For Octavian the matter was urgent. We have seen reasons for Octavian's lack of legitimacy in the eyes of soldiers; his authority was contested within the legions even after Actium, Octavian feared the rise of an alternative leader and money was critically short. What if Caesarion were to promise money in the late Julius Caesar's name to soldiers who revered his memory? Octavian would remember that, in spite of widespread and highly damaging reluctance in Antony's army to follow a command in which Cleopatra was associated (Charlesworth and Tarn, 1934, 96), most of his soldiers had eventually done so. The outpouring of anti-Egyptian, anti-oriental, sentiments with which we are familiar, above all from the poets Horace, Propertius²⁵ and Virgil, dates mainly from the period after the deaths of Cleopatra and Caesarion.

Hereditary monarchy offered a distinct prospect for the economy and moral status of Rome and Italy. A landowning aristocracy, such as that of the Roman Republic, was hardly likely to emigrate en masse, however much time many of its members might individually spend in the Greek East. It was tied by its real estate to Italy. A hereditary monarchy, in contrast, was portable, as Alexander had unforgettably shown – so long as it stayed close to the soldiers who were its chief support. Power was where the monarch was. Caesar himself had spent so much of his life far from Italy that, in his later lifetime, he could hardly be counted on to settle at Rome permanently. And then there were the reports that he planned to invade Parthia, in what would seem, at the time as well as later, an enduring cultural inclination towards the image of Alexander (he with whom Octavian-Augustus too would claim an affiliation 18.1; 50, cf. 94.5), an

inclination, that is, to the Greek East. Rumours attributed to him a desire to move the capital eastwards, to Alexandria or elsewhere (Nic. Dem. F130.68; Suet. *DJ* 79.3). After Caesar's death, as Octavian acted as hereditary prince, and Antony – the most authoritative Caesarian leader after Philippi, the one with the most choice – chose to go east and, it would increasingly appear, to stay there, in the other great city of the Mediterranean, the prospect of Rome's becoming secondary would intensify (cf. Plut. *Ant.* 50.4, on resentment at Rome of Antony's privileging Alexandria in 34). Octavian before Actium judged it useful to publish at Rome a clause (genuine or falsified) in Antony's will stipulating that he be buried at Alexandria, prompting widespread belief that Antony planned to replace Rome as the formal seat of power (Plut. *Ant.* 58.4; Dio 50.3–4.2).²⁶ Soon after Actium (Suet. *DJ* 100), Octavian's completion of his own mausoleum was eloquently programmatic: Romans need not fear that he would desert them, in death or in life.²⁷ To advertise his commitment to keeping Rome as his capital was evidently deemed to outweigh the negative aspects of that building: the thoughts it would arouse of his own somewhat regal autocracy, of the fragility of his health and thus of his settlement.²⁸

Sextus Pompeius' blockade had ingrained a hard lesson (one which Virgil's *Georgics* sought eloquently and laboriously to dispel),²⁹ that Rome and Italy could not properly feed themselves, were dependent on wheat from Africa and in particular from Egypt. After the fall of Sextus, Antony evidently allowed the grain ships to deliver far more than had previously been getting through to Rome. But could Alexandria be relied on indefinitely in this way? Roman nervousness on this subject, in the 30s, may be reflected in the decision of Octavian after Actium to forbid Roman senators to enter the new province. Calming fears about the permanent degrading of Rome under a Caesarian dynasty may have been a task involving years of reassuring action and words.³⁰

The months following Actium may have been particularly nervous for those Romans who feared that the capital of the empire might move to somewhere more Greek, to Alexandria. Octavian himself headed for the Ptolemaic capital. Might he even stay there? With hindsight, we may see no problem. But Romans at the time would reflect that Cleopatra had borne children to two great Caesarians in succession. Might Octavian, long eminently questionable as heir of Julius Caesar, not decide that it would after all *add* to his legitimacy, after despatching Antony, to embrace his 'father's' woman, the mother of Julius Caesar's child? Cleopatra's wealth – for those who believed in it – might seem capable of quietening the legions. Alexandria – with Ptolemies as allies of Octavian – might offer greater safety from assassination. Ptolemy-and-Caesar, suitably managed, might

offer a ready-made prospect for the succession, at least for a while. (Might not Octavian himself, whose only child was a daughter, expect in time to profit directly from Cleopatra's fertility?) Such ideas may seem fantastic, in retrospect. Cleopatra, after all, had been Octavian's enemy, indeed the officially-declared enemy of the Roman state (Dio 50.4.4–6.1). Octavian would, on the above hypothesis, have been succeeding to the widow of Antony, father of most of her children. But Livia had been Octavian's enemy. He had effectively persecuted her and her infant child after Perusia, when his men were hunting her husband, his enemy-in-arms Tiberius Claudius Nero; in addition he had helped to cause her father's death – and then he had married her (Suet. *Tib.* 4.2f.; 6; Dio 48.15.3f.; 44.1). Syme may be found reassuring: Cleopatra, he writes, 'was neither young nor beautiful' (1939, 274), citing only Plutarch, *Antony* 57. Actually what Plutarch there wrote was, that Cleopatra was 'neither more beautiful nor more young than Octavia', which is not quite the same (cf. Plut. *Ant.* 27.2–3, but contrast the doubly superlative term used of the queen at Dio 42.34.3–5: περικαλλεστάτη γυναικῶν, 'the most surpassingly beautiful of women'). Anyway, there were political marriages, against the grain – Octavian had had two already, the first being to Scribonia. She was related by marriage to his long-time enemy Sextus Pompeius. He had married her not in spite of the old and profound enmity, but because of it. And Cleopatra's assets for a political marriage were hardly less than Scribonia's.

Prediction was supremely difficult: in a general population consisting of political amateurs, short of reliable news and as yet more accustomed to Republican political *mores* than to sudden alliances and ruptures among Rome's new and somewhat-hellenistic dynasts, the period between 49 and 30 must have engendered a certain bewilderment as to who might one day kill or embrace whom.³¹ Roman armies were first the enemies of each other but then, after the deaths or defection of a few leaders, re-absorbed into one. Former enemies of the state might attain the consulship. Seasoned allies turned on each other. Romans at enmity with each other formed marriage-alliances, then fought again. We know of the painful ambiguity in Octavia's position, sister of a man ever more obviously the enemy of her husband, while that husband himself behaved fairly consistently as the spouse of Cleopatra. Because Cleopatra eventually (in our eyes) won the battle for Antony's affection, hindsight makes us less interested in the ancient reports that Cleopatra too was apprehensive of the influence of Octavia, fearful that Antony might, in Churchill's expression, 're-rat' (Plut. *Ant.* 53.3, 57.1, 59.2, 72.2). Even for dynasts themselves, that is, little was predictable in the long term. When we read Dio's account of how Octavian tried to persuade Cleopatra that he was in

love with her, and that Cleopatra worked elaborately to seduce him, and indeed achieved a certain effect, we may understandably reflect that it is rather our ancient writers who have been seduced, by dramatic opportunity, and move on. But the main point for historians is surely not that the Last Days of Cleopatra are unknowable, but that contemporaries in Italy had good reason to be nervous about what would ensue as one more Caesarian entered the queen's sphere. It may be that the tales of attempted seduction arose from those contemporary fears.

What may our prospective approach tell us about events in Alexandria involving Octavian and Cleopatra? Death, for the historian, is a privileged site. We may not know, for example, whether there really was a battle worthy of the name at Actium.³² But we can be almost sure that Cleopatra died at approximately the time recorded in our sources. Even the most sophisticatedly mendacious of regimes find it impossible, or at least very difficult, to falsify the record as to whether, and approximately when, leaders have died.³³ Octavian had personal and painful experience of how the timely deaths of rivals, real or potential, might be attributed to him: in 43 the consuls Hirtius and Pansa had, at the moment of their victory in battle alongside Octavian, died, leaving him in sole charge of a conquering army. Intense suspicions were aroused ('Tac. *Ann.* 1.10; Suet. *DA* 11; Dio 46.39.1), and to the question *Cui bono?* the most obvious answer was, 'Octavian'. M. Oppius who, during the 'proscriptions', had comprehensively and publicly humiliated Octavian in the matter of filial *pietas*, died young.³⁴ Tiberius Claudius Nero, who was scandalously persuaded to cede his pregnant wife Livia to Octavian, spared the latter further embarrassment by dying 'not long afterwards' (Suet. *Tib.* 4.3). Domitius Ahenobarbus, for long a powerful opponent of Octavian, died – reportedly of illness or shame – 'not long' (or indeed 'immediately') after his belated defection brought him into Octavian's power (Dio 50.13.6; Plut. *Ant.* 63.2–3). And in the mass murders which were the 'proscriptions', Octavian was seen as more implacably and enduringly lethal than his two fellow triumvirs (Suet. *DA* 27.1f). In the circumstances, special care might be needed to explain Cleopatra's death shortly after she too came under Octavian's control. Many modern scholars have believed that Octavian arranged her death.³⁵ That she stayed alive for the reported nine days (Skeat 1953) after the death of Antony is possible, but quite uncertain. Far more likely, on the other hand, is that Octavian wanted it believed that she had killed herself; and the nine days of her reported survival provided the space in which he could later locate events to demonstrate his own desire to keep her alive. It is also virtually certain, given the extraordinary tenacity and resourcefulness recorded of Cleopatra in other contexts, that she was not

normally suicidal; probably, then, Octavian could have contrived the means to make her want to live, had he been so minded.

Implausible or counterfactual clemency is a pronounced theme in the propaganda of Octavian-Augustus: he claimed to have spared Sextus Pompeius, presumably in letting him escape after Naulochus (Dio 50.1.4); even those Roman opponents whom he actually put to death after capture in civil war (in circumstances of which the cruelty was never forgotten) would have been spared, he implied in the *Res Gestae* (s. 3), if only they had asked for pardon. The only such to die were evidently those who did not so ask. In short, that they died was their own fault (similarly Velleius 2.87). Even more than her femininity,³⁶ Cleopatra's grounded claims to a Caesarian identity made it essential, if Octavian did kill her, that the fact be obscured. Pelling well notes that for Octavian to have admitted that he had tried to keep her alive (for the impeccably patriotic reason that she was to adorn his triumph)³⁷ would have been an admission of failure (1988, 319; cf. 1996, 65). But an admission of an unsuccessful attempt to keep alive a woman who was Caesar's former publicly-esteemed lover was perhaps less damaging than the alternative, the default, conclusion which the uninformed majority of Romans would otherwise have been expected to draw from the skeleton of news which crossed the Mediterranean: that Octavian had conquered Egypt, that Antony, Cleopatra, Caesarion and Antyllus were all dead and that Octavian was directly responsible in all cases and in rather the same way. It has been well said (by Christopher Pelling) that the official discourse of Octavian-Augustus after Actium involved a 'rhetoric of honesty'. Here, surely, was a case where an appearance of honest admission of failure was exceptionally useful to achieve a higher rhetorical purpose, that of avoiding the charge of having killed Cleopatra. For to have killed that woman might not only have seemed inhumane; to many it would have seemed unCaesarian. Republicans might celebrate, but legionaries and veterans of Caesar's cause might feel differently, later or sooner. Inhumanity and falling-away from Caesarian behaviour were qualities for which Octavian was already notorious; they – far more than an innocent underestimate of royal, female, deviousness – threatened his reputation and thus his prospect of survival at Rome.

Cleopatra's death freed Octavian of the dread that many Romans are likely to have felt, and to have held against him, that he might – later or sooner – compound with her and with what she represented, and establish a hellenistic dynasty which degraded, if not replaced, Rome as capital. A triumph, like Caesar's over Vercingetorix, might be awaited for years: who knew what might happen to Cleopatra's status in the meanwhile, or

indeed afterwards? Tarn (1934, 109) memorably evoked the 'awkwardness', for the Princeps, of having the captive queen 'on some Aegean rock writing her memoirs'. But a living Cleopatra went beyond the awkward; indeed, Octavian might calculate that if she were to survive as other than an implacable enemy of his, Caesarion would have to be spared too (as Groag effectively observed: 1915, 62). Octavian might expect his more Republican-minded compatriots to perceive, and to dread with possibly lethal results for himself, a grave prospect: that the deposed queen would recover her famous influence over the House of Caesar.

In dwelling on the death of Cleopatra, historians arguably have been obliged to play Octavian's game. The story of sexual advances and mutual deceit between dynasts, of desperate courage and aggressive suicide in unforgettably visual circumstances, helped to build up Cleopatra as a worthy opponent, an intriguing embodiment of both potent femininity and monstrous masculinity. It could be expected to dominate the public memory of events: that is, perhaps, to distract. For Octavian had another challenge in Egypt after the death of Antony. Ptolemy-and-Caesar, 'Caesarion', now attracts little more attention in standard accounts of the period than does the battle of Tauromenium.³⁸ The neglect flows from our sources. Pelling (1988, 312) observes of Plutarch's words on Caesarion's death: 'Plutarch could have excited more emotion if he had wished... He prefers to leave the climax for Cleopatra.' Exactly. Now, surely John Crook was right to ask, concerning the year 32, 'If the claim was going round that the only real son of Julius Caesar's blood was not the upstart who bore his name and controlled his patronage, but a youth numbered among the adherents of Antony, might not Octavian's supporters have doubts, and his veterans waver in their allegiance?' (1957, 38). Even after Actium, with legions still of doubtful obedience, Octavian would, at the time and thinking prospectively, have reflected on the enormous mistake which Julius Caesar could seem to have made, in leaving the younger son of Pompey the Great alive after the battle of Munda. That negligible refugee youth was to become, for years, the master of the western Mediterranean: it was he, Sextus Pompeius, who came close to killing Octavian at Tauromenium. Accordingly, a chief task for Octavian, after conquering Alexandria, was to seize young Ptolemy-and-Caesar. If, as we read (Plut. *Ant.* 81.2), Caesarion had been sent southwards by his mother, Octavian would need rapidly to establish with what resources, of men and treasure, he might be equipped. And if indeed Octavian allowed Cleopatra to remain alive for days,³⁹ it might be speculated that one purpose of this was to use her to inform himself about Caesarion, perhaps even to manipulate the queen into bringing him back. The youth did, we read, turn back, assured

by his evil tutor Rhodon that Octavian was inviting him to rule Egypt. The blame cast on the tutor should even make us wonder whether it was Octavian himself who communicated that false hope, guided by Cleopatra as to how to make contact with her son. Not only might Cleopatra be well placed to know Caesarion's whereabouts; she alone might have the means to make her son see any communication as authentically from her. If so, better for Octavian to be remembered as having been deceived by Cleopatra than as having deceived a desperate woman into bringing about her son's death.

On the end of Little Caesar, like that of Little Antony, surviving detail is scarce, although in each case moral indignation at the killing of a young person is deflected in the Augustan manner. The immaturity of the pair meant that the Augustan exculpatory formula was inapplicable: the lads could hardly be portrayed as responsible for their own deaths. Instead, each is shown as the victim of a treacherous tutor: the guilty pedagogue is named in both cases (Plut. *Ant.* 81; cf. Suet. *DA* 17.5, Dio 51.15.5). The guilt of Antyllus' tutor was, we read, spectacularly advertised (presumably at Octavian's order): he was crucified for stealing from the youth's body (Plut. *Ant.* 81.1). Even in the case of the two youngsters, who were too young for suicide to be a plausible story, the ultimate author of their killing is spared explicit blame. There is further moral deflection. Plutarch (*Ant.* 81.2) suggests that Octavian, before killing Caesarion, deliberated (presumably in private) on what to do with him, and was advised by the philosopher Areios. The latter memorably adjusted a maxim from the *Iliad* which decried a plurality of leaders: οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκοιρανίη (*Il.*2.204) became οὐκ ἀγαθὸν πολυκαισαρίη ('a multiplicity of Caesars is not a good thing'). In other respects, Octavian publicly conversed with Areios, treating him with exceptional honour, as the emblematic representative of Alexandria (Plut. *Ant.* 80). It would have been quite in character if Octavian himself introduced Areios' *mot* into the historical tradition, as a means of hinting that even Alexandria might reasonably approve the killing of Ptolemy-and-Caesar.

If we suspect that Octavian made some effort to stress the responsibility of others for these two killings, we may better imagine his motives in possibly constructing a self-exculpatory narrative of Cleopatra's death. But what, perhaps, should most impress us is precisely the shortage of surviving information about Caesarion's death, the contrast between that and the lavish detail concerning Cleopatra's end. For to contemporary thinking Ptolemy-and-Caesar might represent in the long term an even greater threat, militarily and morally, than did his mother. The death of the last of the reigning Ptolemies, who in a unique and spectacular combination of

ancestry was also the last plausible descendant of the founding autocrat of Rome, might indeed have attracted more elaborate storytelling – if political circumstances had allowed. But they surely did not allow. If it was difficult politically for the shakily-Caesarian ruler of Rome to admit to killing Caesar's avowed lover, how much more damaging would have been brutal detail about his killing of his 'father's' only natural son? Propaganda has its limits: some subjects are better minimised, if not avoided.⁴⁰

Elaborate storytelling about Cleopatra's end would have to satisfy and distract the curiosity of Romans. But that Ptolemy-and-Caesar has hardly troubled historians in retrospect does not mean that he did not trouble Octavian, and interest his contemporaries, in prospect. That Julius Caesar's plausible son and possible successor is now generally reduced to a historical coda, referred to by a nickname, may itself be an inverted monument, testimony to the fact that hindsight can be more enduring than brass.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

¹ The ultimate source for this report is Livy (fr. 54), who claims that the queen spoke thus repeatedly, while in the generous form of captivity which Octavian allowed her. The story evidently suited Octavian-Augustus; cf. Hor. *Od.* 1.37, 31–2.

² cf. Syme 1939, 479 and index under 'Conspiracies'.

³ For references, Powell 2006.

⁴ An exception is Welch 2012, index s.v. 'Misenum, treaty of' and esp. pp. 250f.

⁵ de Ste. Croix 1981, 360; cf. Powell 2008, 23–24.

⁶ Powell 2008, 24, 74, 107, 172.

⁷ So, for example, *CAH*² 1996, vol. 10, pp. 35 (Pelling) and 435 (Wilson). Tauromenium is also excluded from the index of battles in Rosenstein and Morstein-Marx 2010, 700.

⁸ Powell, 2009, 186–8.

⁹ Welch 2012, 269–72.

¹⁰ Powell 2008, ch. 2 and p.141.

¹¹ Thus, for example, the oak wreath 'for citizens saved' on the *aurei* of Sextus Pompeius was a comment on the massacres of civilians conducted by his enemies, Octavian, Antony and Lepidus: Powell 2002, 118–120.

¹² For partisan references to Sextus' 'piracy', Powell and Welch 2002, index under 'Pompeius, Sextus, "piracy"'.

¹³ Thus Charlesworth and Tarn 1934, 90: '...it is unlikely that the inner history and exact truth of the important period lying between 37 and 30 will ever be discovered, because the facts have been obscured and distorted by the propaganda of both sides...'

To which, while broadly agreeing, we might add that this statement itself is evidence of how retrospective propaganda has ‘obscured and distorted’ – because the statement apparently overlooks the existence of a third ‘side’, that represented until 36 by Sextus Pompeius. Pelling is radically sceptical about the reality of the ‘Donations of Alexandria’ ascribed to 34 (Plut. *Ant.* 54; Dio 49.41): ‘...the significance as well as the historical truth of the ceremonial is uncertain’ (1988, 250). On Actium and the subsequent fighting in Egypt, Tarn wrote (1934, 101–2), ‘Till we come to Antony’s final defeat on land, no satisfactory account of the campaign is possible’; similarly Syme 1939, 296–7 (‘The true story is gone beyond recall’), and Pelling 1996, 66.

¹⁴ Gransden 1984, 214, with Powell 2008, 8, 22.

¹⁵ Dio 51.4.3–6; Suetonius *DA* 17.2–3. The latter gives precise and graphic detail of the horrors Octavian suffered, and escaped, at sea during this episode; did this come ultimately from Augustus’ memoirs? We recall the similarly vivid narrative (in Appian) of danger at sea, and survival, concerning Octavian after the battle of Tauromenium.

¹⁶ cf. Broughton 1985.

¹⁷ See, for example, Gruen 1992.

¹⁸ On Caesar’s use of Greek, Pelling 2011, 317f., 347.

¹⁹ If Caesar indeed ordered that the bill appear in his absence, that may reflect a wish to avoid a backlash against the clearly royal implications of the measure.

²⁰ Contrast Charlesworth 1933, 176–7: ‘That the so-called Caesarion was in truth the son of Julius Caesar is now universally accepted...’

²¹ Invaluable contemporary evidence is Cicero’s apparent reference, ironic or not, to Cleopatra’s infant as ‘Caesar’ (*Att.* 374 [14.20].2). For other ancient testimony to the child’s Caesarian descent, Pelling 1988, 250–51.

²² Gruen (2003, 259) sees better than most the intense potential significance of this statue, but accordingly denies the veracity of Appian’s report that Caesar in his lifetime placed the statue in the temple; he infers rather from a somewhat vague passage of Dio (51.22.3) that Octavian-Augustus brought the statue from Egypt as plunder. This begs the question of who, if it was not Julius Caesar, placed the statue in the latter’s temple of Venus Genetrix; for Octavian-Augustus to have done so would have amounted to legitimating, if not legitimising, Caesarion, whom he had killed.

²³ Powell 2008, *passim*.

²⁴ Griffin 1985, 190–3, cf. Powell 2008, 24–5.

²⁵ Note especially 3.11.34 on ‘guilty Alexandria, land of treachery’ (*noxia Alexandria, dolis aptissima tellus*).

²⁶ For discussion of Antony’s will, and the evidence for it, Crook (1957), Johnson (1978). The detail – invidious for Octavian – that the Vestal Virgins had forbidden access to the will, only to be overborn by Octavian, may have had for that dynast a compensatory quality: it tended to answer, or forestall, the obvious question of whether the document which Octavian was exploiting was genuine.

²⁷ If we were right to argue (Powell 2008, *passim*) that qualities embodied in the hero of the *Aeneid* respond to the most problematic weaknesses in the character of Octavian-Augustus, the fact that Aeneas is portrayed as tenaciously journeying west and north, seeking Italy, seeking to establish his people there, may be a further indication that in reality the Princeps’ commitment to the west still remained to be demonstrated.

²⁸ Syme in this connection enters intelligently into contemporary prospects: '...salvation hung upon a single thread. Well might men adjure the gods of Rome to preserve that precious life...' (1939, 304). For less successful engagement with hindsight, in the same author: Syme 1939, 219–20 with Powell 2008, 22.

²⁹ Powell 2008, ch. 7.

³⁰ Syme correctly observes (1939, 305), '...men might fear...lest the capital of empire be transferred to other lands. The propaganda of Octavianus had skilfully worked upon such apprehensions. Once aroused they would be difficult to allay...'

³¹ See Pelling 1996, 1, 4 on *anomie* and unpredictability in the politics of the period.

³² 'The battle of Actium was a very lame affair. Such as it was, Antony and Cleopatra arguably won it.' – Pelling 1996, 59.

³³ That is why the mortality rate of Spartan commanders on campaign, notably higher than that of their Athenian counterparts, is capital evidence for the question whether secretive Sparta did indeed have at home the unusual militaristic ethic of which she boasted.

³⁴ Powell 2008, 62–3.

³⁵ Tarn 1934, 109; Pelling 1996, 64.

³⁶ The Roman crowds had felt revulsion in 46 at the display of Arsinoe, Cleopatra's sister, in chains at Julius Caesar's triumph: afterwards, Caesar had felt obliged to spare her, rather than to despatch her after the triumph like Jugurtha and Vercingetorix (Dio 43.19.3–4).

³⁷ A consideration that might have tempted Octavian to keep the queen alive for his triumph was, that in this matter – exceptionally – he might appear to have outdone Julius Caesar in a military sphere, to the extent that *his* captured Ptolemaic queen, Cleopatra VII, had clearly been a more formidable threat to Rome than had been Caesar's Egyptian trophy, Arsinoe IV. However, any satisfaction from the comparison was compromised by the fact that captured and degraded Cleopatra had also been Caesar's trophy in quite a different way. As the image of the dead Cleopatra was paraded in Octavian's triumph of 29, one wonders what was the status of the golden statue of the queen which Caesar had placed in his temple of Venus Genetrix.

³⁸ Thus, e.g., the index of Syme (1939) has only 3 references to 'Ptolemy Caesar', all brief: similarly the 1996 edition of the *Cambridge Ancient History* refers to 'Caesarion' on only six pages.

³⁹ Pelling has argued (1996, 65) that, had Octavian wanted to kill Cleopatra, he could have done so immediately, exploiting the confusion of Alexandria's capture. But as well as being, perhaps, an object of fascination, Cleopatra was for a while an intelligence asset.

⁴⁰ One thinks of the reaction within the Third Reich, as Germany and Imperial Japan became increasingly close allies during the Second World War. How should propaganda treat the subject of the diverse ethnicities involved? Goebbels judged that such propaganda was beyond even him: 'I have forbidden the German news services even to mention these ticklish and somewhat delicate problems, as I am convinced we can't win any laurels here...our position with Japan...is rather precarious, since we are uncompromising in our racial views. It is best to overcome this difficulty by silence.' (diary entry for January 27, 1942: Lochner 1948, 17).

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Addendum

Those studying historians' hindsight in connection with the last years of Cleopatra VII may find much profit (as well as pleasure) in an unexpected quarter. The book *Les enfants d'Alexandrie* by the French historical novelist Françoise Chandernagor (Paris, 2011) studies the period from the perspective of the queen's children, and engages explicitly with the dangers of 'le recul'. Presented as a 'novel', the work shows a mastery of, and meticulous respect for, the ancient source-material, while also being rich in imaginative but realistic hypotheses. Its author has, for example, understood the political significance of Caesarion to an extent that academic historians usually have not. She has also seen the possibility that speculation, however ignorant, existed in 30 BC about a possible intimate alliance between Cleopatra and Octavian. The genre of 'historical novel', by compelling a focus on the development of contemporary mentalities, encourages the discipline of asking how various characters would variously predict. The historical novelist may in general be obliged to reflect intensely on what characters actually knew before decisive events. But writers in the genre have perhaps rarely succeeded so well as the French author of this informative and moving study.

MEMORIAE EXIMERE: AD 41 AND THE SURVIVAL OF REPUBLICANISM UNDER THE PRINCIPATE

Katherine Low

If the great mass of empire were able to stand balanced without anyone to guide it, I would be the right person to initiate a Republic; now, a state of inevitability has long been reached that means that my age cannot bestow more on the Roman people than a good successor, nor your youth than a good emperor.

si immensum imperii corpus stare ac librari sine rectore posset, dignus eram a quo res publica inciperet: nunc eo necessitatis iam pridem ventum est ut nec mea senectus conferre plus populo Romano possit quam bonum successorem, nec tua plus inventa quam bonum principem. (Tac. *Hist.* 1.16.1).

At the beginning of Tacitus' *Histories*, the new *princeps* Galba thus justifies his adoption of Piso Licinianus. He undertakes to replace the Julio-Claudian hereditary system, which culminated in Nero's excesses, with one in which each emperor will choose a worthy successor. Galba is of course unable to maintain his own position, let alone that of Piso, for much longer, but the *Histories'* account of how the Flavian dynasty emerged from the civil wars of 69–70 confirms his assertion that a return to the republican system is not a possibility. Now, it may well be that it is under the influence of hindsight that Tacitus gives him these words: the historian knew that no attempt to abolish the Principate was made at that time, or later.¹ But while this passage appears to be the only reference, however tentative, to the prospect of major systemic change after Nero's death, there is on the contrary a body of evidence for efforts to 'restore the Republic' after Caligula's assassination in 41.² In what follows the significance of those efforts will be considered, and the question of why they were not repeated in 69 or at any other point will be discussed. It will be argued that hindsight, in both ancient and modern authors, has had a significant influence on how the Principate as an institution of the first century AD and beyond has been perceived.

I

The sources report that on January 24th 41 Caligula was assassinated by Cassius Chaerea and other praetorian officers, who acted with the knowledge of a number of prominent individuals led by Annus Vinicianus.³ Almost immediately, a struggle ensued over the imperial succession. The Senate was keen to follow the lead of the conspirators and the consuls, who sought a restoration of the Republic.⁴ After a senatorial meeting, the consuls took delight in giving out the daily watchword in republican style: for that day they chose '*libertas*'. But this turn of events was opposed by Claudius, who had been acclaimed emperor – almost by accident, the sources report – by the praetorian guard.

Although the senators were at first not deterred by Claudius' elevation, fuller knowledge of his military backing soon overawed most of them. When the urban cohorts, which had supported the Senate but were now wavering, demanded that an emperor be appointed, a number of senators came forward. But the candidates were either forestalled by others, or renounced their claims in fear. Seeing the futility of the Senate's position, the soldiers departed abruptly for the praetorian camp to join Claudius, leaving the senators no alternative but to throw themselves on his mercy. The new emperor took steps to secure his position, although he refrained from the large-scale purge that senators feared. But as his troubled relationship with the Senate in the early years of his reign would show, support for republicanist ideas was strong and persistent.⁵

As far as is known, the events summarised above constitute the only institutional lacuna in the history of the Roman Principate: the only occasion when, albeit for a very short time, there was no emperor and no prospect of one. This was no early hiatus that occurred before the Principate had become well established, since Caligula died some seventy years after Actium. Nevertheless, although this brief but suggestive episode received some attention from ancient authors, it has been accorded little space in modern accounts of the period. This discussion will consider why this might be so, and will reflect on the significance of the events of 41, and their consequences.

II

While the ancient sources for what happened – Josephus, Suetonius and Dio – provide firm evidence for the efforts made to abolish the Principate at that time, it is striking that the most detailed account, that of

Josephus, was written soonest after the event. It seems possible that the uninterrupted continuation of the Principate over the following centuries influenced both ancient and modern authors, encouraging them to play down these futile attempts to bring about constitutional change. The evidence, however, actually suggests that the conspirators had a reasonable chance of succeeding. Not only that, but strong currents of republican feeling at that time can be discerned, and in fact in the year after his accession Claudius had to quash another attempted coup that aimed to abolish the Principate (see below). It is not surprising that the new emperor made strenuous efforts to eradicate anti-imperial sentiments, not least by appropriating the rhetoric of his opponents for the purposes of the Principate. The conspirators' failure (in both 41 and 42) and Claudius' usurpation of republican-style discourse may well have discouraged any future attempts to abolish the Principate, but another aspect of their failure must also be considered. It is significant both that the Principate continued despite their efforts, and that it was Claudius who became the new *princeps*. It will be proposed that his public emphasis on the dynastic nature of the Principate, and the changes he initiated while he was emperor, had a significant effect on the institution itself and on the way in which subsequent historians have viewed it.

As noted above, the main ancient sources for Caligula's assassination and its aftermath are Dio, Suetonius and, in much greater detail, Josephus. His version of events goes some way to making up for the absence of Tacitus' account (which would have been found in the missing books of the *Annals*), and has received some attention from modern scholars.⁶ Otherwise, recent historical studies are in most cases conspicuously neglectful of what happened in 41,⁷ and the possible reasons for this will be discussed below.

Dio concludes Book 59 of his work with an account of Caligula's assassination (59.29–30).⁸ The consuls and Senate then gather on the Capitol with the imperial treasures (59.30.3). At the beginning of the next book their meeting is described. Opinions are divided: 'some approved of republicanism, others of monarchy, and some were for one man, some for another' (τοῖς μὲν γὰρ δημοκρατεῖσθαι, τοῖς δὲ μοναρχεῖσθαι ἔδόκει, καὶ οἱ μὲν τὸν οἱ δὲ τὸν ἡροῦντο, 60.1.1). But then, Dio reports, Claudius was found hiding, and acclaimed as emperor (60.1.2). The soldiers who had supported the consuls ceased to do so, and the Senate gave way (60.1.4). It is worth noting that elsewhere Claudius is said to have been proclaimed emperor before the Senate's meeting, but that it went ahead anyway. This version, in which the meeting comes first, implies that as soon as the praetorians found him the republican game was up.

Suetonius describes what happened in a little more detail. His *Life* of Caligula recounts how the emperor's outrageous behaviour led to the formation of plots against him, not least by Cassius Chaerea, whom he often mocked (*Cal.* 56.2). Numerous omens are said to have marked his approaching death (*ibid.* 57). When the assassination occurred, Suetonius notes that:

The conspirators did not mark out any one person to become emperor, and the Senate was so united in its desire to reclaim *libertas* that the consuls first of all summoned its members to a meeting not in the Senate-house, because it was called the 'curia Julia', but in the Capitol. Some actually proposed that the record of the Caesars should be obliterated and their temples destroyed.

neque coniurati cuiquam imperium destinaverunt; et senatus in asserenda libertate adeo consensit, ut consules primo non in curiam, quia Iulia vocabatur, sed in Capitolium convocarent, quidam vero sententiae loco abolendam Caesarum memoriam ac diruenda templa censuerint. (*ibid.* 60)

No other action taken by the Senate is mentioned. The work then ends by aligning Caligula with other Gaii Caesares who were murdered, notably Julius Caesar. In the *Life* of Claudius, Suetonius mentions how after the assassination:

The consuls, along with the Senate and the urban cohorts, had seized the forum and the Capitol with the intention of reclaiming *libertas* for all.

consules cum senatu et cohortibus urbanis forum Capitoliumque occupaverant asserturi communem libertatem. (*Div. Clau.* 10.3)

He goes on, however, to report that the Senate was unable to agree on anything; popular calls for a new *princeps* are said to have tipped the balance. Claudius became emperor.

These two relatively brief reports contrast with Josephus' lengthy account at *Antiquitates Judaicae* 19.1–273 (there is also a much shorter version in the earlier *Bellum Judaicum*, at 2.204–14). The historian justifies its inclusion in his text by noting how the Palestinian Jews, whom Caligula had persecuted, were saved by his death, and then announcing that an extended narrative of what happened will serve a moral purpose, by showing how tyrants get their come-uppance:⁹

I wish to give a precise account of the whole story, not least since it provides substantial proof of the power of God, and comforts those who are afflicted by misfortune, and teaches restraint to those who think that good fortune lasts forever and do not realise that it turns out badly if it is not accompanied by virtue.

βούλομαι δι' ἀκριβείας τὸν πάντα περὶ αὐτοῦ λόγον διελθεῖν, ἄλλως τε ἐπειδὴ καὶ πολλὴν ἔχει πίστιν τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δυνάμεως καὶ παραμυθίαν τοῖς ἐν τύχαις

κειμένους καὶ σωφρονισμόν τοῖς οἰομένοις αἰδίων τὴν εὐτυχίαν, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἐπιμεταφέρειν κακῶς ἀρετῆς αὐτῇ μὴ παραγενομένης. (*AJ* 19.15–16)

Josephus relies on at least one Roman source, and its identity has been the subject of much debate. Wiseman has in fact maintained that two separate source-strands can be detected in the narrative.¹⁰ Following Mommsen and others, he posits that the main source was the senatorial historian Cluvius Rufus;¹¹ he suggests that the work of Fabius Rusticus was also consulted. While this use of more than one source cannot be proven, it does not seem implausible: Wiseman persuasively argues that doublets and changes of tone can be discerned in the narrative. However, if Josephus did rely on different sources, he was not necessarily inept in doing so, and in any case the arguments to be advanced here can apply to them too.

The narrative begins by outlining Caligula's outrageous behaviour and the early plans made by Chaerea to assassinate him (*AJ* 19.1–69). The latter's republicanism is stressed, and his reported speeches play on this idea, but he is not alone. When, early in the plot, he joins up with Vinicianus, they choose the evocative password 'liberty' (19.54). The conspiracy proceeds, and eventually the emperor is assassinated on leaving a theatrical show (19.106–13). Once Caligula is dead, his German bodyguard embark on a frenzy of revenge (19.121–6) but desist 'so that they might not attract the Senate's attention, if that body acquired control, or that of the man who came to power' (...μὴ...ἐπιστροφή γένοιτο ὑπὸ τῆς βουλῆς, εἴπερ εἰς ἐκείνην περισταίῃ τὸ κράτος, ἢ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐπικαταστάντος ἄρχοντος 19.151). As Wiseman points out, this reflects the 'constitutionally proper order of alternatives';¹² it also foreshadows how the Senate will briefly claim power before Claudius' position becomes unassailable. Soon afterwards, the Senate and the people meet: republican institutions are shown to be reviving (19.158). The senatorial meeting is distinguished by the consul Saturninus' speech (19.167–84),¹³ which combines standard anti-tyrannical tropes ('I was there and I saw the kind of evils with which tyrannies infect states'; οἷς δὲ ὄψει ὁμιλήσας ἡσθόμην, οἷων κακῶν τὰς πολιτείας ἀναπιμπλάσιν αἱ τυραννίδες..., 19.172) with evocations of freedom in a Roman context which acknowledge its role in the past, and its current precarious position:

I cannot recall the freedom we formerly had, because I was born too late for it. But now, as I greedily fill myself with it, I consider that those who were born and brought up amid it were blessed, and that these men who have finally and at this stage of our lives given us a taste of it are worthy of just as much honour as the gods.

ἐμοὶ δὲ τῆς μὲν πρότερον ἐλευθερίας ἀμνημονεῖν ἔστι διὰ τὸ κατόπιν αὐτῆς γεγενῆσθαι, τῆς δὲ νῦν ἀπλήστως πιμπλαμένῳ μακαριστοῦς τε ἡγεῖσθαι τοὺς ἐγγενηθέντας καὶ ἐντραφέντας αὐτῇ καὶ τῶν θεῶν οὐδὲν μειόνως ἀξίους τιμῆς

τούσδε τοὺς ἄνδρας, οἱ ὃς γούν κἀν τούτῳ τῆς ἡλικίας ἡμᾶς γεύσαντας αὐτῆς. (19.169)¹⁴

Afterwards, both consuls give the watchword ‘liberty’ to the urban cohorts (19.186). The narrator explains that this was what happened in the old days:

...for in the hundredth year since they had first been deprived of the Republic, giving the watchword reverted to the consuls: they were responsible for the soldiers before the city became subject to tyrannical rule.

...ἔτει γὰρ ἑκατοστῷ, μεθ’ ὃ τὴν δημοκρατίαν τὸ πρῶτον ἀφῆρέθησαν, ἐπὶ τοὺς ὑπάτους σημείου ἢ παράδοσις· οἷτοι γὰρ πρότερον ἢ τυραννηθῆναι τὴν πόλιν κύριοι τῶν στρατιωτικῶν ἦσαν. (19.187)¹⁵

The narrative continues with the deaths of Caligula’s wife Caesonia and their daughter (19.190–200) and then, after a discursive obituary of Caligula (19.201–11), switches to Claudius’ discovery and acclamation by the praetorian guard.¹⁶ Josephus mentions the popular support for an emperor: the people are said to see the *princeps* as a ‘curb’ (ἐπιστόμιμα) for the Senate’s greed, and a ‘refuge’ (καταφυγή) for themselves (19.228). The senators send embassies to Claudius, beseeching him to step aside or at least to agree to receive the Principate as the Senate’s gift (19.229–33). Later, some possible alternative imperial candidates, Marcus Vinicius and Valerius Asiaticus, emerge (19.251–3),¹⁷ but the defection of those cohorts still on the Senate’s side curtails any further negotiations (19.259). Claudius takes little immediate revenge, but Chaerea has to die, and does so bravely (19.268–71).

III

There seems to be no reason to doubt that here is substantial evidence that after Caligula’s assassination a group of individuals attempted to restore the Republic; after the murder, steps were taken to put their plan into action, and they enjoyed a reasonable degree of support. Accordingly, the almost complete failure of modern historical discussions to register the events of 41 (see nn. 6–7) is puzzling, but one possible reason for this is suggested by the nature of the sources that are summarised above.¹⁸ The notice in Dio, who was writing at the beginning of the third century AD, is markedly short, and focuses on Claudius’ accession more than the possibility of constitutional change. The description in Suetonius’ works, which date from the first part of the second century, includes a little more detail, but the focus soon shifts from the Senate and consuls to the new emperor. However, the *Antiquitates Judaicae*, with its lengthy set-piece account of what happened, was completed before the end of the first century.

There are several possible explanations of why Josephus' narrative is so detailed,¹⁹ while Dio and Suetonius may both have had plausible reasons for treating the events of 41 less fully. Suetonius' biographies focus on personal traits and how an emperor's actions, arranged in thematic categories, may elucidate his character,²⁰ while the scope of Dio's whole work is great and, when structuring his account of the Principate, he focuses on imperial figures.²¹ Nevertheless, it is interesting that in these cases the extent of the coverage given is in inverse proportion to the number of years after 41 that the work in question was produced. Could it be that temporal distance from what happened brought about a diminution of interest in the attempts to restore the Republic?²² For all three historians, the 'Principate was fact, the Republic memory',²³ and each passing imperial year would have only confirmed that.²⁴ Moreover, if this was a factor in how ancient authors viewed the attempts to establish an alternative to the Principate in 41, it may well apply *a fortiori* to their modern counterparts as well. Hindsight – the knowledge that the Republic was not restored after Caligula's death, and that no one appears to have ever attempted this subsequently – seems to have led scholars to play down or simply ignore what happened, especially when faced with such patchy treatment of it in the surviving sources.²⁵

IV

However, to argue that temporal distance is the sole factor in how historians have presented the events of 41 would be simplistic. It is worth focusing in more detail on the hindsight posited above, and considering whether it can be attributed to specific factors: the rest of the discussion will be devoted to that question.

Claudius' accession appears not to have immediately eliminated all opposition. In their narratives of what happened subsequently, all three authors mentioned above take care to single out some of Claudius' early actions as *princeps*. Josephus reports that only Agrippa's intervention stopped the emperor from taking violent reprisals against the recalcitrant senators (*AJ* 19.264–5), and refers to a purge of all suspect army units (*AJ* 19.274). This is surprising, as Claudius' military support is elsewhere stressed.²⁶ Dio says that the new emperor first avoided the Senate, as it had proposed better candidates than him (60.3.2). Finally, Suetonius speaks of a highly suggestive attempt to rewrite – or rather, unwrite – the history of the interval between Caligula's death and Claudius' own accession:²⁷

After securing power, his first priority was to obliterate references to the two-day period during which there had been some hesitant thought over changing the constitution.

imperio stabilito nihil antiquius duxit quam id biduum, quo de mutando rei publicae statu haesitatum erat, memoriae eximere. (Div.Cla. 11.1)

The text of the *Life* of Claudius itself confirms the failure of any such strategy.

This behaviour may, of course, only mean that Claudius was concerned for his own safety during an unstable period, when other plausible imperial candidates had been mooted (Dio 60.3.2 stresses this; see above and n. 17), and wanted to portray his accession as assured in order to secure his future.²⁸ But such acts also suggest that the new emperor was genuinely worried about what the conspirators might have gone on to achieve, and considered that they still presented a threat, if only to his pride. Admittedly, these details do not actually prove that republican feeling was strong. But a survey of Claudius' early reign may suggest that it was, and that in the early 40s the Principate's continuation was not seen as historically inevitable. A return to the Republic was still thought by some to be a real possibility.

The evidence for this falls into two parts. The first is how Claudius sought to appropriate republican discourse for the Principate from the outset. Second are the struggles between him and the Senate that seem to have characterised his early years as emperor, in which republicanism appears to have been a point of contention. The threat was not just anti-Claudian, or even anti-Principate, but pro-republican.

Support for the first point is offered by Claudius' coin issues. Three new legends appear from the very beginning of his reign. One of these early coin-types proclaimed *LIBERTAS AUGUSTA*. *Libertas* had previously appeared on both republican and imperial coins, but not conjoined with an adjective linking it to the imperial house in this way, and this has been seen as a rejoinder to the proclamations of *libertas*, in the sense of republican freedom, by the conspirators.²⁹ These coins appear to show Claudius reclaiming the idea of *libertas* for the Principate: the implication is that the concept is not limited to the Republic.³⁰ Two other new coin-types also appeared in 41. Issues commemorated the role of the praetorians in Claudius' accession, declaring *IMPER[ATOR] RECEPT[US]* and *PRAETOR[IANUS] RECEPT[US]*.³¹ These legends are conspicuous references to a republican military designation, '*imperator*', that acquired a new significance under the Principate, and to the praetorians, who had been created by the Caesars. They challenge republicanist discourse, just as the *libertas* coin-types do. They are a gesture, perhaps conciliatory, perhaps

not, at those who had paraded their republican sentiments and tried to put them into practice.

This can be linked to what is known about Claudius' relations with the Senate. A complex chain of events lies behind the report that he killed 35 senators while emperor.³² Despite reported efforts to win its favour after his accession, there seems to have been a steady stream of senatorial plots against him.³³ To disentangle cause and effect in this context is not easy, and indeed beyond the bounds of this paper. It would also touch upon the question of hereditary senatorial resistance to the Principate, which is not necessarily linked to the events of 41 and which, again, cannot be dealt with here.³⁴ But it can be maintained that Claudius' re-appropriation of republican terminology, and the attitude underlying it, contributed to discontent at least in the early part of his principate. In this connection, the revolt of Scribonianus, governor of Dalmatia, in 42 is crucial.

Dio reports (60.15.1) that this insurrection was triggered by the murder of Silanus, but it can plausibly be linked to the events of the previous year. According to Dio himself (60.15.1) and Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.43.2), Lucius Vinicianus and Pomponius Secundus (suffect consul of 41) were involved. Both men figured prominently in the conspiracy against Caligula.³⁵ Moreover, Scribonianus is described by Dio as 'offering them the semblance of a Republic and promising to restore old-fashioned freedom' (τό τε τοῦ δήμου σφίσιν ὄνομα προτείνοντος καὶ τὴν ἀρχαίαν ἐλευθερίαν ἀποδώσειν ὑπισχνουμένου, 60.15.3).

Despite Dio's cynical phrasing,³⁶ Scribonianus' troops clearly believed that it was reasonably likely that he would succeed, as they suspected that if he did 'trouble and conflict' (πράγματα...καὶ στάσεις) would return, and accordingly ceased to obey him (*ibid.*). Nor were they alone in their confidence that the rebel had a chance of achieving his aim. Dio also notes (60.15.4) that Claudius was, until the soldiers gave up, terrified, and thought of resigning his position to Scribonianus.³⁷

This episode suggests that the efforts made to abolish the Principate and restore the Republic in 42 may have posed a genuine threat. With military support, it seems possible that they could have succeeded. In addition, Swan (1970, 164) has also argued that Scribonianus' promise of a freedom that was 'old-fashioned' (ἀρχαία) was a reaction to Claudius' proclamations of *libertas* sanctioned by the Principate, which in turn had been motivated by the conspiracy of 41. This supports the idea that Claudius embraced various republican terms in order to neutralise them, as a response to the dangerous notions that had been current after Caligula's death. The counter-proclamation of liberty in a different sense indicates that his efforts were seen through.

It has been shown that the attempts to restore the Republic that followed Caligula's assassination reflected a current of genuine feeling that had continued impact.³⁸ As has been seen, however, soldiers' actions in both 41 and 42 seem to have barred this course. It is tempting to consider that it was merely the Praetorians and then regular troops who prevented the Republic from being restored at that time, and to wonder what would have happened if the soldiers had not supported Claudius, but further speculation about the unknowable consequences of that unrealised event would seem to achieve little.³⁹ More worthy of comment is the fact that references in the sources to republicanism are extremely rare after these years. Indeed it appears that, aside from Galba's counterfactual assertion quoted above, a putative restoration of the Republic is only mentioned on one other occasion after 41. Tacitus, in his account of the Pisonian conspiracy of 65, notes that the conspirators, aiming to replace Nero with Piso, refrained from inviting the consul Vestinus to join them '...in case he should rise for freedom, or choose another emperor and make the state his own gift' (*...ne ad libertatem oreretur, vel delecto imperatore alio sui muneris rem publicam faceret*, *Ann.*15.52.3).⁴⁰ The alternative sequence of possibilities embodied in this brief comment forms a nice 'What if?', as do the events of 41, but there seems to be no other evidence to which it can be anchored; in any case, the conspiracy soon fails. Of course, Tacitus and other authors include many details about what may be called 'emotional republicanism', represented by the phenomenon of Stoic opposition, the 'canonisation' of Cato, Brutus and Cassius and so on, but it is not linked to any active revolutionary measures like those of 41.⁴¹

V

So it seems that after Claudius' principate there were no further attempts to restore the Republic. The measures the emperor took against those who harboured republican sentiments were no doubt stringent, but it would be bold to suggest that it was his appropriation of republican discourse alone that meant that no one ever again tried to abolish the Principate. A further aspect of the question remains to be considered: what difference did his principate make to the institution itself, and the way in which it was seen? Modern surveys of Claudius' reign have highlighted a number of salient features. While the older view that he undertook a considered policy of centralisation has been discredited, his interest in extending the citizenship within the empire is well known, and as emperor he effected significant organisational reforms in a number of sectors.⁴² These changes seem to

have contributed quite substantially to the development of the Principate as an institution that served to govern an entire empire from Rome outwards – and was not tied to the current emperor. It may also be suggested that such actions, even if not part of a deliberate and pre-planned strategy, were enabled by the presence of one guiding figure at the top.⁴³ It seems less likely that even a senatorial oligarchy would have been able to promulgate measures of this kind. Claudius, merely by not representing such a form of government, played a significant role in making of the Principate a workable ruling institution.

It could be objected that similar developments would have ensued if someone else had become emperor in the early 40s: one of the senatorial candidates that Josephus mentions, perhaps. But there is another aspect of Claudius' rule that almost no one other than he could have represented: the continuity he brought to the Principate. A different emperor might well have acted as Claudius did – but in coming to power he would have represented a new start, a different dynasty, even a precedent for senatorial choice. The accession of Claudius, who 'more clearly than any other adult male belonged to the old "August House"' (Osgood 2011, 31), meant that there was no break in the sequence.⁴⁴ The Principate was evolving into a dynastic monarchy, and there are signs that Claudius himself knew and willed this.

A further innovative legend that appeared on coins commemorating Britannicus' birth – in 41, again, so at an early stage – was *SPES AUGUSTA*.⁴⁵ It denotes the *princeps*' intention of securing a successor, and his manifest hope of an imperial future. With this can be juxtaposed Claudius' habit of ostentatiously emulating Augustus. Other coin-types he favoured included those with the legends *PATER PATRIAE* and *OB CIVES SERVATOS*, which the first emperor had introduced and made famous.⁴⁶ Suetonius also reports that he initiated a whole raft of measures to honour Augustus (as well as Livia, Germanicus and even Mark Antony) and expressed personal devotion to him (*Div. Clau.* 11.2–3).⁴⁷ These stressed dynastic continuity and the interrelations between all members of the *domus Augusta*: the Claudian outsider became part of a sequence of Julio-Claudian emperors.⁴⁸ His emphasis on the birth of his son looked towards a future in which this would continue.⁴⁹ It was mentioned earlier that Claudius supposedly sought to 'obliterate reference to' (*memoriae eximere*) part of the past, and Suetonius elsewhere notes that during his reign he continued writing a history of Rome from the beginning to 44 BC, and then from 31 BC to the present (*Div. Clau.* 41.2). One wonders how he treated that recent period in particular.⁵⁰

Even when Britannicus was replaced by Nero,⁵¹ the 'Claudian dynasty'

itself was rather short lived. But the model created by Claudius endured. He contributed to the evolution of the Principate in administrative terms, and reinvented it as a dynastic institution, both by his very status as a Julio-Claudian, and via his self-presentation. He established precedents that would be followed and developed in future.⁵² It is difficult to gauge the reaction of contemporaries to all this, although the aforementioned sense of friction between him and the Senate may be significant. Notably, he also appears to have enjoyed a good deal of popular support.⁵³ But it is telling that the next time there was a crisis in the Principate, in 68 and 69, there seems to be absolutely no evidence that a return to the Republic was mooted, and in fact a later historian takes care to exclude this possibility.⁵⁴ Moreover, the civil wars led to the formation of another dynasty on the Julio-Claudian model, and not for the last time.

In conclusion, the actions of those men who sought to restore the Republic in January 41 were more significant than most accounts of the period allow. Anything more than vague speculation about what would have happened if they had been successful is impossible, but a consideration of their failure and its consequences has been worthwhile. Claudius' accession and his actions as *princeps* made a great difference to the institution he occupied, and to subsequent perceptions of it. As a result, it seems that modern historians – and ancient ones as well – have been encouraged by this continuity to see possible threats to the Principate merely as brief interruptions in the infolding of an 'inevitable' historical trajectory. The assassination of Caligula and its aftermath was less the end of practical republicanism, and more the beginning of the Roman Principate as it has been known ever since.

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Notes

¹ See Gowing 2005, 103–4 (and n. 54 below). Note also O’Gorman 2006, esp. 283–4, on Piso’s significance as a scion of a virtual ‘Pisonian dynasty’ in the *Histories* and *Annals* and how this can be seen as suggesting that the Principate’s emergence is ‘not entirely contingent upon the existence and actions of the individual who happens to hold the position of *princeps*, but rather...is deeply embedded as a mode of political thinking and political desire in the aristocracy and plebs of first-century AD Rome’.

² All dates are AD unless otherwise stated.

³ For discussion of the sources see II below. It has been argued (by Jung 1972) that Claudius himself was complicit in the plot, but the evidence for this view is highly conjectural (see Wiseman 1991, 53–4) and accordingly it will be excluded from what follows. Moreover, Jung’s claim (1972, 382–6) that from the outset some plotters sought to restore the Republic, others to install a new emperor – *viz* Claudius himself – is not well supported by the evidence; in any case, the focus here will be on the ‘republicans’.

⁴ For what the ‘restored Republic’ might have been, see n. 39, but this discussion will focus more on what did happen than what did not.

⁵ Summary adapted from Swan 1970, 150–1. On Claudius’ difficult relations with the Senate see above.

⁶ See Timpe 1960 (a thought-provoking study), Feldmann 1962, Swan 1970 and Wiseman 1991. Pagán 2004 and 2006 consider Josephus’ account alongside other conspiracy narratives.

⁷ It is surprising that discussion of the events of 41 is very sparse or absent in Wirszubski 1950 and Gowing 2005, both of which analyse how the Republic and republicanism were viewed under the early Principate (though see now Gallia 2012, 24–5). Gowing hints suggestively at the bare possibility of constitutional change under the Julio-Claudians, but makes no reference to 41: ‘[i]t is easy in hindsight...to understand that after Actium there would be no going back, no matter what the emperor might want you to believe. Yet in the event, someone living in the Augustan and even Tiberian period might well have *believed* that the Principate was, as the triumvirate had been conceived (and proven) to be, merely a sort of interregnum, that the Republic and its ideals would ultimately survive’ (p. 152).

Raaflaub 1987 does discuss what occurred in 41; see also the verbal responses of Momigliano (p. 56) and Yavetz (p. 61). However, he brackets those who sought regime change after Caligula’s death with the republicanist and idealistic philosophical opposition that would come to prominence later in the century (pp. 25, 28), although he does posit that in ‘einer früheren Phase’ their ideas would have seemed more realistic (p. 28). Timpe (1960, 491–3) suggests that the way in which Josephus’ source presented the conspirators was influenced by these later individuals. The line that will be taken here is that Caligula’s assassins were not wishful thinkers who sought to emulate their heroes and return to the old days, but rather genuinely desirous of establishing an alternative to the Principate, which would have given the Senate real power. See also n. 41 below.

Modern narrative histories also tend to downplay what happened. MacMullen (1966, 32) is cursory and rhetorical. In his survey of the period, Wiedemann (1996a, 230) assumes unhesitatingly that the efforts to restore the Republic were a sham: ‘...after the Senate had failed to institute a Caesar of its own, it became politic for

everyone, including the new emperor, to pretend that they had merely been acting in the public interest. The Senate debated the situation in the language of republicanism, and that language masked the ambitions of those involved’.

⁸ For the structural significance of this for Dio’s work see n. 21 below.

⁹ See Feldman 1962, 328–9 on further possible reasons for Josephus’ inclusion of this episode. It allows the historian to give prominence to the role played by Agrippa I, in whom he is deeply interested (it might be added that this is even more apparent in Josephus’ other account, at *BJ* 2.206–15), and he may also have hoped that such an eventful narrative would help sell his work, or sought to imply a parallel between Caligula and Domitian, or merely followed his own interests.

¹⁰ Wiseman 1991, esp. xii–xiv; cf. e.g. Timpe 1960 and Feldman 1962.

¹¹ Wiseman 1991, 111–18. Cf. Wardle 1992, esp. 478–82.

¹² Wiseman 1991, 69.

¹³ See n. 22 below on how a short section describing Claudius’ acclamation as emperor by the Praetorians precedes the speech, prefiguring a later, more extensive account, and see Timpe 1960, 491 on the possible significance of the fact that it is Saturninus who is the speaker.

¹⁴ ‘...have given us a taste of it’ (...ἡμᾶς γεύσαντας αὐτῆς): the language of tasting power is often used elsewhere by an autocratic ruler when addressing a potential successor (cf. Woodman 2006, 183–4). I owe this point to Rhiannon Ash. For the implications of the detail for Josephus’ narrative see n. 22 below.

¹⁵ However, under the Republic there were no urban cohorts: see Wiseman 1991, 80 and cf. Timpe 1960, 487. Josephus does not seem alive to the irony.

¹⁶ Wiseman (1991, 86) suggests that Josephus switches at 19.212 to the other source for his account; cf. nn. 13 and 22.

¹⁷ For Suillius’ later allegations about the potential threat posed by Asiaticus to Claudius, which mention that he played a key role in Caligula’s assassination and its aftermath, cf. Tac. *Ann.* 11.1.2. Dio 60.15.1 also notes that Lucius Vinicianus was proposed as an imperial candidate; see Swan 1970, 149–59.

¹⁸ For some general remarks on the sources’ shortcomings see Levick 1990, 33–4.

¹⁹ See n. 9.

²⁰ Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 15–18 and 142–74.

²¹ See Pelling 1997, esp. 117–8, who argues that the biographical focus is strongest at the beginnings and ends of reigns. Highly relevant here is Dio 60.1–2, where a brief summary of the Senate’s deliberations and Claudius’ discovery by the Praetorians leads smoothly into an introductory account of his character and background. The details of the accession do not seem particularly important. Moreover, Dio is more generally quite explicit about the gap between Republic and Empire, and the repercussions for historiography: see 53.19.

²² It is also important to note that even Josephus’ account may not be untouched by hindsight – Jung (1972, 376) points out that the short description of Claudius’ acclamation as emperor at 19.162–5, which precedes the longer one at 19.212–28, shows up the consuls’ and Senate’s subsequent efforts to re-establish the Republic as pathetically misguided. The inconcinnity is probably due to a change of source (see n. 16) but that does not mean that Josephus was not seeking to remind his audience (who of course would have already been aware of the outcome) of what was going to happen, directly before Saturninus’ idealistic speech (19.167–84). Moreover, see n. 14

above: the fact that Saturninus echoes the language of autocratic succession may prepare for the appearance of other imperial candidates and undermine the republican sentiments that have been voiced (cf. n. 39 below). The consul is also shown to be wearing a ring bearing the emperor's image, which is then dramatically smashed (19.185); the Principate is indeed a more pervasive influence than he implies. Cf. Timpe (1960, 476–7).

²³ Hurley 2001, 1. Cf. Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 141: '[t]he root conception of the Principate [in Suetonius' works] is optimistic, of a potential bulwark and support of the great Roman tradition'. The same considerations would presumably have applied to the sources used by each author. On those of Josephus, see above and nn. 10–11, while for Suetonius', see Wallace-Hadrill 1983, 59–66 and 87–96; cf. Wardle 1992. On Dio's use of material, see Millar 1964, 34–8.

²⁴ It should be remembered that each author would have been aware of the civil wars of 69–70, and the fact that no attempts were made to change the constitution then. Still, as Rhiannon Ash points out, these historians' apparent lack of interest in what happened in 41 and what could have ensued afterwards may be surprising, given that Roman awareness of the possibilities of counterfactual history is attested. See O'Gorman 2006, esp. 293–301, and Morello 2002 on Livy 9.17–19.

²⁵ This notion has been advanced in passing by modern commentators considering imperial attitudes in ancient sources to Republicanism: see Sonnabend 2000, 109–10. It is also mentioned by Timpe (1960, 480), and can be linked to the concept of backshadowing (cf. Lisa Hau's paper on sideshadowing, this volume). This is defined by Morson (1994, 13; cf. Berstein 1994) as 'foreshadowing after the fact: the past is treated as if it had inevitably lead to the present we know and as if signs of our present should have been visible to our predecessors'. In other words, it is to see a chain of events in retrospect as unavoidable, with the implication that the historical actors of the time should have known what was going to happen.

²⁶ The Praetorians are responsible for proposing him as emperor (see *AJ* 19.162–5 and 212–27), but see also *AJ* 19.249 and 254–9 when other units withdraw their support from the Senate (n.b. how these '...went to Claudius to join up with those [sc. the Praetorians] who were swearing allegiance to him', ...ῥχοντο ὡς τὸν Κλαύδιον κοινωνήσουσιν τοῖς ὀμνύουσιν αὐτῷ, 19.259).

²⁷ Moreover, Levick (1990, 33–4 and 203 n. 11; cf. Jung 1970, 381–6) conjectures the existence of an 'official' account of Claudius' accession, which stressed the Praetorians' active role and implied his reluctance to take power, and of which some traces may remain in the sources.

²⁸ The new emperor, no doubt judiciously, did not resort to wholesale violence: Suetonius goes on to mention that only a few conspirators were executed. Dio 60.3.4–5 omits the expunging of the record but stresses how most of those involved in the assassination received honours, and adds that a kind of amnesty was announced, on the model of the Athenians in 403 BC (see also the late, Christianised version at Orosius *adv. pag.* 7.6.1–5, and Mehl [1978], who speculates that Tacitus' lost account was used by Orosius).

²⁹ Mattingly 1976, civii; on the political message, see Swan 1970, 163–4. Zehnacker (1987, 328) notes how it echoes Saturninus' speech, as recounted by Josephus, and its espousal of *libertas*. Claudius was not the last prominent individual to use *libertas* and other republican slogans under the empire: see Wiedemann 1996b, 256–8 and now

Gallia 2012, 14–32 on the coinage of Vindex and Galba (at pp. 21–25 and 28–32 Gallia also discusses the usage of *libertas* in the early principate more generally), and Griffin 2000, 86 on Nerva. Cf. also Morgan 1997.

³⁰ The word *libertas* here must strictly be used in its weaker sense of personal and civic rights, although Claudius was obviously exploiting the fact that the term could have a range of meanings: see Wirszubski 1950, 125 and cf. Gallia 2012, 29–32.

³¹ Mattingly 1976, clii–iii and Zehnacker 1987, 325.

³² Suet. *Div. Clau.* 29.2. Cf. Sen. *Apoc.* 14.1.

³³ Suet. *Div. Clau.* 13 summarises them. See also n. 28 above, and further Dio 60.4 for how Claudius reversed many of Gaius' acts. Cf. Swan 1970, 159–60.

³⁴ On this question, see McAlindon 1956 and 1957. In general, see Raaflaub 1987, esp. 38–45. He stresses (p. 39) the role of the Principate as an institution, and its natural development, as factors in generating senatorial opposition, and warns against blaming the emperor (as the ancient sources tend to) for all cases of resentment.

³⁵ For Vinicianus, see *AJ* 19.49–60 and 252 and for Secundus 19.263–4; more generally, see Swan 1970, 159–64 (and cf. n. 17 above).

³⁶ 'the semblance of a Republic' (τό...τοῦ δήμου...ὄνομα): Dio's ironic presentation, contrasted with the troops' reported enthusiasm, perhaps illustrates his own dismissive attitude to Republicanism (above and nn. 21 and 23). The possibility that Dio saw the Principate as characterised by a gulf between appearance and reality may also be relevant; see Pelling 1991, 128–9. More generally, cf. also Morgan 1997 on how the same political slogans in the late Republic could be deployed by individuals with very different aims.

³⁷ Swan 1970, 162: although Scribonianus may not have been sincere, he made his proclamation 'probably in the knowledge that there were important elements of Republican temper to whom his professed policy would appeal'.

³⁸ Although Caligula's outrageous behaviour (cf. Jos. *AJ* 19.1–36 and Suet. *Cal.* 56) is presented as reason enough for the formation of a plot against him, one wonders to what extent these republican sentiments had existed since the establishment of the Principate. There has been some doubt over how far Augustus claimed to have restored the old Republic: see Judge 1974, while Rich and Williams (1999, esp. 204–12) offer a nuanced discussion. Nevertheless, the first emperor's self-presentation as an upholder of tradition is well known (*RG* 6.1, 'I accepted no magistracy offered to me contrary to ancestral custom', *nullum magistratum contra morem maiorum delatum recepi*; cf. *RG* 8.5). It has also been argued that not only did Tiberius seek to maintain continuity with the republican past, but the iconography and literature of his principate were marked by a sense of the 'survival of the Republic' (Gowing 2005, 28–66; see 32 n. 6 for references to discussions of Tiberius' regime as a 'continuation' of the Republic). Caligula's principate was different: the sources stress the breakdown of his relationship with the Senate and the eventually tyrannical nature of his rule (Barrett 1989, 234–41). The outbreak of republicanism in 41 may have been linked to this dissolution of the façade.

³⁹ If the Republic had been restored, what form would it have taken? A return to 'true' republicanism seems unlikely; cf. Swan's speculations (1970, 158–9): '[t]aking as their model the heyday of the Roman Republic, [the conspirators] hoped to replace, or at least to control, the Principate with a nascent senatorial oligarchy...Their willingness to settle for a Principate subordinated to senatorial authority [i.e. with a

senatorial candidate as emperor] underlines the fact that their Republicanism was as much social as political'. It is also worth noting that, in Josephus' much shorter account of the events of 41 in the *BJ*, the Senate is said to have sought 'to establish government by aristocracy, as it had been administered in the past, or choose by vote a man worthy of ruling' (καταστήσεσθαι...δι' ἀριστοκρατίας, ὥσπερ οὖν πάλαι διωκεῖτο, τὴν ἀρχὴν ἢ κρίνειν ψήφῳ τὸν ἄξιον τῆς ἡγεμονίας, 2.205). Within the shorter compass of this account, which focuses more on Agrippa I's decisive role as mediator between the Senate and the new emperor than on the earlier moves for political change (cf. n. 9 above), Josephus is more cynical about the unsuccessful republicans' motives. In any case, see Flower 2010 on the complications that arise when defining 'the Republic'.

⁴⁰ Syme 1958, 548: 'Tacitus may concede Republican aspirations, or rather (for he is very careful), report beliefs and rumours.' Koestermann (1968, 278) compares 'how much more laudably would he die while embracing the state, while summoning help for freedom?' (*quanto laudabilius periturum, dum amplectitur rem publicam, dum auxilia libertati invocat!*, *Ann.* 15.59.3), but there the entreaties of the chief conspirator Piso's friends not to capitulate now that the plot has been uncovered are very obviously rhetorical, and clearly bound to fail. Cf. O'Gorman 2006, 285–91.

⁴¹ On 'emotional republicanism' in general, see MacMullen 1966, 1–94. In the context of the events of 41, Raaflaub (1987, 28; see n. 7 above) highlights the apparent objections of 'extremists' such as Helvidius Priscus not only to the ruling emperor but also to the system; see also Timpe 1960, 492–3. But whatever the sentiments of such figures, it seems that they did not seek to put them into practice.

⁴² Levick 1990, 81–91. On citizenship, see *ead.* 1990, 164–5 and Osgood 2011, 161–4.

⁴³ Osgood 2011, 256, highlights how Claudius left mementos of his Principate throughout the empire (in the form of 'roads, temples, statues, decrees, speeches, diplomas'), and assiduously disseminated his own image.

⁴⁴ In Josephus' account, the Praetorians are made to realise this at *AJ* 19.164, (and cf. 19.223).

⁴⁵ Mattingly 1976, clvi.

⁴⁶ Mattingly 1976, cli–ii. It is true that Caligula took the title *Pater Patriae* and used the legend *OB CIVES SERVATOS* but, in contrast with Claudius' actions, this does not fit into a wider context of Augustan emulation. Moreover, both terms had a pre-imperial pedigree: in deploying them, Claudius thus followed Augustus and further displayed his 'republican' credentials.

⁴⁷ See Jung 1972, 370–1 on Claudius' strong links to Germanicus, both before and after his accession. Jung notes how republican sentiments were popularly attributed to the latter (n.b. Tac. *Ann.* 1.33.2 and 2.82.2, although see Goodyear 1972, 251–2 for some salutary remarks on the likely sincerity and plausibility of such a stance): in the context of the present discussion, the tributes Claudius paid to his deceased brother look slightly ironic.

⁴⁸ Wiseman (1982, 67) outlines the misleading nature of the expression 'Julio-Claudian dynasty'; cf. Levick 1975. On Claudius' emulation of Augustus (and, she argues, Julius Caesar) see Levick 1990, 90–1; Osgood (2011, 216–8; cf. 91) discusses further ways in which imitation of Augustus, creation of a new dynasty, and legitimization of Claudius' own position were intertwined.

⁴⁹ The name 'Britannicus' also commemorated how Claudius had made his mark

on the empire by beginning the proper conquest of Britain, as did his extension of the *pomerium* (see Tac. *Ann.* 12.23.2–24.1, where it is noted that Augustus did the same, and Boatwright 1984, esp. 36–9).

⁵⁰ There is of course one extant item of evidence for Claudius' view of Roman history: the Tabula Lugdunensis (Smallwood 369). Interestingly, in the section that surveys Roman history as a whole, the emperor seems inclined to undermine the importance and distinct identity of the Republic. An unobtrusive reference to its formation follows a long disquisition on the early kings: 'and the administration of the state was transferred to the consuls (*et ad consules...administratio rei p. translata est*, I.26–7 in Smallwood's edition). The following survey of the republican era stresses its implicitly autocratic aspects, such as dictatorships, decemvirs and the multiplication 'severalfold' (*in [pl]u[r]is*, I.34) of consular *imperia*. Unfortunately a lacuna obscures most of the material on the transition between Republic and Principate, but it is notable that Julius Caesar ('*divom Iulium*', II.34) is cited for his military rather than political achievements, while his juxtaposition with Claudius' father Drusus quietly assimilates him to an imperial personage. Augustus and Tiberius are presented as innovators ('with a new practice', *novo m[ore]*, II.1), but only for their policy towards non-Italian senators, and Claudius' broader argument requires him to underplay the results: 'so what?' (*quid ergo?*, II.5).

This apparent stress on Rome's historical precedents for autocracy and on the less republican aspects of the Republic (cf. Tac. *Ann.* 1.1.1), along with what may have been a lack of emphasis on the emergence of the Principate, may perhaps be linked to the views expressed here about Claudius' attempts to present himself as part of a sequence of rulers, and to oppose individuals who openly proclaimed their republican sentiments. Cf. also Momigliano 1961, 1–19, who sees the Tabula's text as evidence for a Claudian view that the past was 'a complex of institutions, customs, and memories worthy to be preserved or restored only in so far as they served the needs of the day – he accepted in full, that is to say, the ideas underlying the Augustan Principate' (p. 19). Again, this suggestion complements the idea that Claudius sought to use republican discourse for his own purposes and to contribute to the Principate's evolution as an institution.

⁵¹ See Osgood 2011, 225–41 on the preparations that seem to have been made for Nero's accession in the later years of Claudius' principate.

⁵² N.B. Osgood 2011, 256: 'it was Claudius, Augustus, and (to a lesser extent) Tiberius who were cited as the precedents in the law concerning Vespasian's powers'. One dynasty served as the model for the next. Cf. also the focus of Levick (1990, 196) on the precedent established by the military support for Claudius' accession, and on how the fact that he managed to stay in power stabilised the empire.

⁵³ Levick 1978, 87–90.

⁵⁴ See Gallia 2012, 28. If Vestinus (see above) did genuinely harbour an intention to restore the Republic in 65, the fact that despite his detachment from the Pisonian conspiracy he was nevertheless killed by Nero (*Ann.* 15.68–9) may have been a further disincentive. On Tacitus' views on the impossibility of constitutional change, as expressed in Galba's speech, see above. Of course, hindsight may well have influenced what he wrote, but note that Gowing (2005, 104) goes on to assert that 'Galba's speech anticipates the situation of the Flavian period, when the urge to claim a "return to the Republic" has subsided, the reality of and necessity for the Principate at last largely accepted.'

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INDEX

Greek names of persons and places are listed in hellenised form, wherever possible: thus 'Alkibiades', 'Korinth' and 'Phleious' but 'Thucydides'. Roman personal names are placed according to their most familiar element today: thus 'Agrippa' is under 'A' rather than 'V' (for 'Vipsanius').

- Achaios 156–7
- Actium, battle 174–5, 179–180, 183–4, 191
- Aeneas 187
- Aeneid* 187
- Agathokles 126
- Agesilaos 85–6, 99–103, 107
- Agricola 5
- Agrippa, M. 183–4
- Ahenobarbus, Domitius 191
- Aigai 122, 127
- Akragas 58
- Alexander the Great 4, 7, 12, 119–120, 188
 - Successors to Ch. 6 *passim*
 - hypothetical attack on Rome, in Livy 76
- Alexander IV, son of Rhoxane 129
- Alexandria 123, 184, 191, 194
 - Roman fear of 173, 188–9; see also 'hellenisation (of Rome)'
- Alkibiades 53, 55, 58–9
- Alkidas 81–2
- Alkmaionids 32
- Amastris 133
- Americans, native 7
- Amphipolis 78–9
- Amyklaians 97
- Amyntas IV 122
- Angrist, M. 149, 163
- Antigonids 114, 119, 131
- Antigonos Gonatas 113, 117, 131
- Antigonos I Monophthalmos 118–9, 129–33
- Antiochos III 156
- Antipatros 125
- Antiphon 2, 10
- Antony, Mark 16–17, 174, 178–80, 184–5, 187–9
- Antyllos 17, 187, 192, 194
- Aoüs, river 160
- Apame 132
- Apollonia 185
- Appian 174, 176
- 'Arab Spring' 149
- Areios 194
- Argead house 120–1, 128
- Aristotle 93
- Arrhidaïos (of Macedon; = Philip III) 121–2, 124–5
- Arrhidaïos (of Hellespontine Phrygia) 132
- Arsinoe IV 197 nn. 36–7
- Artemision 34, 36
- Asandros of Karia 132
- Athenagoras 53
- Athens 102
 - as saviour of Greece against Persia 13–15, 28, 38–9 and Ch. 2 *passim*
 - empire of 25–26
 - scenarios for domination of Sicily Ch. 3 *passim*
 - potential enslavement of, by Sparta 52, 61
 - potential annihilation by Sparta 173
- Atilius, C. 153
- Atropates 133
- 'Atticus' (T. Pomponius Atticus) 184
- Augustus, see 'Octavian'
- Aulis 101
- Babylon, 117, 124, 133
- 'backshadowing' 72

Index

- Bactria 126
 Barsine 122, 133
 Ben Ali, Z. el-A. 149
 Bernstein, M. A. 72
 Boiotarchs 97
 Boiotians 102
 See also 'Thebans', 'Thebes'
 Bolis 156
 Brasidas 79, 92
 Britain
 and American revolution 7
 empire in India 106–7
 death rate of officers in World War I 8
 military conduct of World War II 8
 anticipation of Communist revolution during World War II 173
 outcome of World War II 1–3; see also 'Home Guard', 'National Health Service'
 Britannicus 211
 Brutus, M. (assassin of Julius Caesar) 184
 Byzantion 100

 Caesar, Julius 5–6, 174, 177, 181, 183–8
 'Caesarion' ('Ptolemy and Caesar') 17, 178, 186–90, 192–4
 Caesonia 206
 Caligula 201–6
 Campanians 58
 Cannae 11
 Cappadocia 133
 Carthage, Carthaginians 9–10, 55, 60–1, 151–3, 155, 158–9; see also 'Punic Wars'
 Cartledge, P. A. 92–3, 97
 Cassius Chaerea 202, 204–6
 Cassius Dio, see 'Dio'
 Chlaineas 156
 'chronocentrism' 72–3, 75, 80
 Churchill, Winston 8, 190
 Cinna, Helvius (tribune) 186
 Claudius Ch. 9 *passim*
 Cleopatra VII 16–17, 172, 179–184, 186–95
 manner of death 180–95
 'cloud from the west' 156

 Cluvius Rufus 205
 coinage, as neglected source for mentalities 178, 208
 Concorde, Place de la 177
 contemporary sources as less affected by hindsight: see 'hindsight'
 counterfactual history, see 'Virtual History', 'Herodotos', 'Polybius', 'Thucydides'
 Cumae 177
 Cyprus 131
 Cyrus the Great 26–7

 Darius
 and Marathon campaign 30–1, 33–4
 Delhi 107
 Delphi 29, 34–5
 Demandt, A. 154–5
 Demetrios, son of Antigonos 117, 130
 Demosthenes (general) 52
 Diadoch War, Third 129
 Diadochoi, see 'Alexander the Great, Successors to'
 Dido 182, 187
 Dio (Cassius) 171–2, 174, 181–3, 190–1, 202–3, 207, 209
 Diodorus Siculus 93, 116–7
 Dionysios of Syracuse 61
 Dover, K. J. 88 n. 9, 89 n. 12
 Durbars 106

 Edward VIII 106
 Egesta 52
 Egypt 118–120, 123–4, 149, 180–95
 elephant-headress 125–6
 Elis 102
 Elymians 58
 Epameinondas 92, 97
 Eretria (of Euboa) 30–3
 Etruscans 58
 Eukleidas 160
 Eumenes 119, 132–3
 Eunoe the Moor 186
 Euphemos 53–4, 58–9
 Euripides 2–3
 Eurybiadas 37
 Eurydike 127–9

- Fabius Pictor 9
 Fabius Rusticus 205
 Ferguson, N. 18 n. 1, 19 n. 17, 20 n. 22,
 49, 67 nn. 54–5, 166 n. 21
 Finley, M. I. and ‘vulgar joke’ 114
 ‘foreshadowing’ 71; see also ‘Morson,
 G. S.’

 Gaddafi, M. 149
 Galba 201
 Gandhi, Mahatma 106
 Gela 58
 Conference of 51, 58–0
 George V 106
Georgics 189
 German bodyguard of Caligula 205
 Germany,
 Third Reich 178
 and outcome of World War II
 1–3, 8
 influence in European Union 172
 Goebbels, P. J. 178, 197 n. 40
 Gorgias 2–3
 Gorgoleon 97
 ‘Great Man (Woman)’ in shaping history
 7–9, 11–12, 14–15, 17–18, 38, 73
 Gylippos 51–2, 57, 83, 92

 Haliartos 102
 Hamilcar 151–2
 Livy imagines attack on Rome
 by 75
 Hamilton, C. D. 95–6
 Hannibal 9–10, 152, 155
 Harris, Robert 1–3
 Hasdrubal 9
 hellenisation (of Rome) 184–5; see also
 ‘Alexandria’
 Herakleia in Trachis 81, 103
 Herakles with lion scalp 125
 Hermokrates 51, 54, 57–9, 61
 Herodotos
 counterfactual history in 28, 34, 36
 and Ch. 2 *passim*, 38
 scenario of Persian victory 13–15
 See also ‘hindsight’, ‘Livy’
 Hieron 158

 hindsight
 more common as sources are
 further from events 33,
 74–6, 82, 86, 206–7; see also ‘Livy’,
 ‘Plutarch’, ‘Polybius’
 Herodotos’ attempts to avoid, Ch. 2
passim
 Thucydides’ attempts to avoid, 50
 and Ch. 3 *passim*, 78–84
 Hirtius, A. 191
 History, Virtual Ch. 1 *passim*, 28, 61 and
 Ch. 3 *passim*
 Hitler, A. 1–2, 15, 105
 Hodgkinson, S. J. 94–5
 Home Guard (U.K.) 173
 Hooker, J. 103
 Horace 188
 Hyperbolos 51
 Hyphasis 124

 Iapygians 58
 Icenii 172
 India 106–7, 126
 Ipsos, battle 131–2
 Ismenias 101
 Isthmos (of Korinth) 37–8

 Japan, Imperial 178, 197 n. 40
 Jews, Palestinian 204
 Josephus 202, 204–7
 journalistic values in writing of history
 173
 Julius Caesar, see ‘Caesar’

 Kadmeia 100
 Kallimachos (polemarch in 490)
 31–2
 Kamarina 57–8
 Kassandreia 127
 Kassandros 113–4, 118–9, 126–31
 Katane 57
 Kennedy, Joseph P. 1
 Kinadon 92
 King’s Peace 102
 Klearchos 99–100
 Kleitos 132
 Kleombrotos 92, 97

Index

- Kleopatra (sister of Alexander) 115,
 122, 126–8, 130
 Knidos 103
 Konon 103
 Korinth 53
 Koroneia, battle (394 BC) 85, 103
 Kouropedion, battle 131
 Krateros 132–3
 Kynnane 127
 Kythera 56, 59
 Kyzikos 102
- Laureion 35
 Lechaion 99, 105
 Leonnatos 128
 Leontinoi 50, 52, 54–5, 57, 59–60
 Leuktra, battle 91–3, 97–8, 104–5
Liber de morte testamentumque Alexandri 126
 Libya 149
 Livia 190–1
 Livy 4, 12, 74–6
 imagines attacks on Rome by
 Alexander, Hamilcar 75–6
 Lund, H. S. 114
 Lykiskos 156
 Lynch, M. 149
 Lysandros 100, 102
 Lysimachos 113–4, 118, 128–31, 133
- Macedon 118, 123, 128, 131
 Maecenas 182
 Mantinea 100–101, 104
 Marathon, battle of 30–4
 Medios 103
 Melian Dialogue 50
 Messana 57–8
 Messapians 58
 Metapontion 57
 Michell, H. 94
 Miltiades 31–2, 38
 Misenum, Treaty of 174–5
 Mnesiphilos 37
 morale 56, 91–2, 103–4
 Morson, G. S. 21 n. 34, 71–2, 154,
 157–8, 215 n. 25
 Munda, battle 174
 Mytilene 50, 77–8, 82
- narrative
 distinguished from reality 71
 historians' new reluctance to write 17
 Naryx 103
 National Health Service (U.K.) 173
 Naulochus, battle 174–5, 183
 Naxos (of Sicily) 57
 Nearchos 121–2, 133
 Nemea 103
 Nesselrath, Heinz-Günther 3
 Nikias 54, 56, 58–60
 Peace of 79
 Nikomedes of Bithynia 185
 Numidians 159
- Octavia 190
 Octavian 16–17, Ch. 8 *passim*
 pattern of military failure 176–7
 clemency, claims to 192
 mausoleum 189
 Ollier, F. 104
 Olympos (Kleopatra's doctor) 182
 Olynthos 99
 Opis 124
 Oppius, C. 187
 Oppius, M. 191
 'overdetermination' 3, 19 n. 5
- Pansa (C. Vibius Pansa Caetronianus),
 191
 Parthia 188
 Pausanias (Periegete) 117–8
 Pausanias (Spartan king) 102
 Peiraion 101
 Peisandros 103
 Peithon 124–5, 132
 Pelling, C. 180–1, 192
 Pelopidas 102
 Perdikkas 114–5, 117, 122–4, 128, 133
 Persian Empire 101
 Persian brides (of Macedonians) 132–3
 Perusia 190
 Peukestas 132
 Phaiax 54, 58
 Pharnabazos 99
 Pharsalos 103
 Philip II 122, 127

- Philip III; see 'Arrhidaios'
- Philip V 160
- Philippi, battle 176
- Phleious 100–102
- Phoibidas 100
- Piso (C. Calpurnius), Pisonian conspiracy 210
- Piso Licinianus 201
- Plataia 102
- Plato 93
- Plutarch 5–6, 36, 39, 67 n. 49, 116–7, 131, 181–2, 193
and 'malice of Herodotos' 31
- Polybius 9–11
and 'backshadowing' 73–4
and 'sideshadowing' 154–5, 161
and hindsight Ch. 7 *passim*
idea of *tychē* 74, 162–3 and Ch. 7 *passim*
and *paideia* 159
- Polyperchon 119, 128
- Pompeius, Sextus 174, 176, 179, 189–90, 192–3
- Pompey the Great 5–6, 179
- Pomponius Secundus 209
- Portus Iulius 177
- Powell, A. 103–4
- propaganda, biased survival of 178–9
- Propertius 188
- Ptolemy I 113–4, 117–127, 129–31
- Ptolemy Keraunos 131
- Punic Wars 9, 11, 151–2, 158
- ram's horns on coins 125
- Rawson, E. 185
- Regulus 158–9
- republicanism, survival of at Rome
under Principate Ch. 9 *passim*
- Rhigion 57–8
- Rhodon 194
- Rhoxane 121–2
- Rome 9–12, 73–4
shipbuilding during First Punic War 152–3
Livy imagines attack by Alexander 76–7
dependence on Egyptian grain 189
- Romilly, J. de 106
- Rosenfeld, Gavriel D. 1
- Rubicon 184
- Saguntum 9–10
- Sainte Croix, Geoffrey de 175
- Salamis 34–8
- Salvius (tribune) 174
- Sardis 101, 156
- Saturninus (consul AD 41) 205
- Schlegel, Friedrich 150
- Scipio, P. Cornelius 155–6
- Scribonia 190
- Scribonianus (L. Arruntius Camillus, governor of Dalmatia) 209
- Seleukos I 114, 118, 126, 128, 131–3
- Selinous 51, 53–4, 58, 60
- Sellasia, battle 160
- Senate (of Rome)
relations with Claudius 209
in AD 41–2 202–5, 208–9
- Sicilian Expedition, of Athens Ch. 3 *passim*
- Sicily Ch. 3 *passim*
potential enslavement of Sicilian cities by Athenians? 51, 53–5
'sideshadowing' 13, 72 and Ch. 4 *passim*, 154; see also 'Morson, G.'
- Sikels 57–8
- Sikinnos 16, 38
- Siris 16, 35, 37
- Siwah 122
- Skerdilaidas 160
- Solon 25
- Soviet Union 173
- Sparta 14, 28, 55, Ch. 5 *passim*, 178, 197 n. 33
possible Athenian designs on 53
- Sphakteria 104–5
- Stahl, H.-P. 63 n. 7, 84
- Strouthas 99
- Suetonius 202, 204, 207–8
- Syme, R. 180, 186, 190, 197 nn. 28, 30, 38
- Syracuse 50, 53–4 and Ch. 3 *passim*
form of democracy 56
- Syria 149

Index

- Tacitus 5, 18, 201, 210
Tanagra 102
Tarn, W. W. 184, 193, 195 n. 13
Tauromenium, battle 174–7, 183
teleology in writing of history 74, 94–5,
114, 133, 150
Teleutias 99, 102
Terillos 61
Thebans, Thebes 91, 97, 100, 102
Themistokles 15–16, 35–8
Theopompos (Spartan polemarch) 97
Thersandros 99
Thespiiai 102
Thessalonike (half-sister of Alexander)
127–8
Thibron 99
Thourioi 57
Thrace 118
Thucydides 11, 14
dissonance between editorial and
narrative 52
emphasis on contingency, 77 and
Ch. 4 *passim*; in history of Sicilian
Expedition, 63 n. 7 and Ch. 3 *passim*
attempts to avoid hindsight, 50 and
Ch. 3 *passim*, 77–84
‘sideshadowing’ in 77–84
occasionally at fault through
hindsight x, 52, 77, 82
Tiberius Claudius Nero (father of Livia)
190–1
Timaios 51, 53
Tolstoy, L. 158
Torone 79
Trasumene, battle 11
Trebia, battle 155
Triparadeisos 125
Tunis 158–9
Tunisia 149
Tyndaris 153
Tyre, proclamation of 129
Unites States of America
scenarios of achieving independence
7
slavery in 7
Valerius Asiaticus 206
Velleius Paterculus 177
Vespasian 182
Vestinus (M. Iulius V. Atticus, consul
AD 65) 210
Vinicianus, Annius 202
Vinicianus, L. 209
Vinicius, M. 206
Virgil 182, 187–9
walls, futility of 33, 38
Welch, Kathryn 174, 177
Wiseman, P. 205
Xanthippos (Spartan general) 159
Xenophon 91, 93, 98–9, 100
‘sideshadowing’ in 85–7
Xerxes 27–8, 39
Yemen 149
Zeus, Zeus Ammon, on coins 125